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Pastoral Counseling in the Inner City

(Condensed)

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I. OUR CONCEPT OF COUNSELING

ALL COUNSELING which is done by a true minister of Jesus Christ must be done in obedience to His holy Word and within the framework of the faith and life of His Church.

It is necessary that we emphasize the fact that such counseling should be pastoral. For there are many streams of thought and life within the Church today which would stress counseling to the neglect of its pastoral content.

Dangers in the Specialized Ministry

There are ministers whose work tends to pull away from the Church in order to work largely with secular means and insights. A truly objective and scientific understanding of the mind and its workings is a divine gift which may do more good than the miracle drugs. Believers are to honor the doctor of medicine and of the mind.¹

It is the Church's office and work, however, to recognize and use its unique source of life and blessing through the forgiveness of sins in Word and Sacrament. "Let the church be the Church!" Scientific and medical people sometimes recognize this principle better than churchmen. The work of the professional psychiatrist and psychologist finds its logical end in the work of the pastor. Ideally, doctor and pastor should work together.²

New Testament Concept of the Ministry

It is interesting to note that our Lutheran Symbols usually speak of the clergyman as a "priest." This is in accord with established usage in the sixteenth century. The New Testament itself, however, never uses the term "priest" as a designation for the pastoral person or office. All true believers in Christ have a common priesthood and status in the eyes of God.³ The Bible also speaks

of ministers of Christ as "overseers" and "stewards." The phase of ministerial work with which we deal probably falls most closely into the traditional work of shepherding and feeding the flock of God. "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? . . ."4 "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. . . ."5

It has always seemed revealing to me that the Bible says nothing of that type of modern pastoral work which merely probes, opens, and invites expressions of inner thoughts, emotions, and subjective feelings. This work is the proper province of the psychiatrist and psychologist. The Christian counselor must recognize his office of convicting by the Law and comforting by the Gospel.

The fifth article of the Augsburg Confession speaks from within solid Christian and catholic concepts when it says: "In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel."6

In spite of this stress on a Gospel ministry Lutheran pastors must always beware of a legalistic concept of their work and office. Here "non-directive" counseling insights can be very valuable in warning all within the catholic tradition that we should not be too quick with answers and directives. Faithful pastors have given answers to questions which were not even asked. Pastors sometimes have a tendency to "talk past" people without ever meeting their true mind and heart. We must "hear out" every man who honestly seeks our counsel. Protestant counseling insights also rightly warn concerning the abuse and tyranny of which any authoritarian and creedal minister must beware. Whenever there is "anti-clericalism" it has been provoked by proud and legalistic "clericalism." Lutherans are not immune from its dangers. . . .

Sometimes, especially in the city, we are regarded as the weakest and least effectual workers! Yet, we must have respect for our own divine call and ministry, and we must at least try to impart this knowledge and faith to the people of our congregation. Even good Christians today are sometimes inclined to regard pastors as merely useful and well-meaning members of society. At the very least, we and those whom God has committed to our care in the congregation must know who and what we are by divine call, appointment, and providence.

Gains and Losses

The Reverend Rudolph F. Norden has made a most interesting comparison between the ministry in 1935 and 1960 in an article entitled, "For Such a Time as This."7 The undoubted advances of the church in our time have not been accomplished without some grievous losses. No one can deny that there has been some diminu-

tion of ministerial fervor and willingness to bear sacrifices and difficulties. Ministers of today are probably more approachable and open-minded than those of a generation ago. We wonder, however, if greater opportunities and contacts have always been followed up with a real application of Law and Gospel.

It is sad indeed that the modern minister is usually "too busy" to read his call on appropriate occasions each year! There are times when Satan himself seems to be working through the very machinery and activity of the modern church, good and necessary as some of it is, in order to obscure the apostolic concept of the minister's person and office. The world has done more than impinge upon the work of the modern ministry. Worldliness has literally flooded into the church itself. The status, life, and work of Christ's minister today are being battered and shaped by hostile and deadly forces from within and from without. Sociological factors no longer protect us in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod from that spiritual anemia and sterile churchliness which have wrought such havoc within American Protestantism.

Too Busy to Counsel

The merry-go-round of "pastoral duties" directly affects our status as pastoral counselors in the city parish or anywhere else in the church. Good people in our congregation know something of the pressures and forces which crowd us. Ever so often we may find that an individual may enter a hospital, or run into serious trouble, without calling or notifying us. We do not like it when our people fail to call us because they feel that we are "too busy." But the fact is that some pastors no longer are doing much counseling simply because their people hesitate to come or call. Counselor and counselee must both have time and opportunity if real work is to be done in this field. The deepest and most pressing concerns of life and death cannot be handled in a rush between plane trips! One wonders just how many out of town assignments on preaching or spiritual life missions a minister can take without neglecting his own flock or giving local people the impression that their own needs are of secondary importance.

What do we say concerning our sense of pastoral responsibility when people in need simply cannot reach us? Time alone will tell what the image of today's busy pastor has done to the Christians in his flock, or those seeking his help, who could not find him in their hour of deepest need.

Too Much Counseling

There are, on the other hand, some pastors whose ministry of counseling now occupies almost all their time and effort. Counseling has overshadowed the preaching, teaching, pastoral, and administrative work of many Protestant ministers. This desire to "serve people where they are" may result in a one-sided and potentially hazardous ministry. There is a real danger that such a pastor will permit individuals to lean upon him in a manner which fosters and

arouses fleshly interests far more than it stimulates a desire for God and divine grace. Such a one-sided approach can easily vitiate or destroy the real work of the ministry in a city church where the usual community and family safeguards have all but disappeared. Individuals "on their own" in the city are a special danger to any pastor whose own weakness inclines him to try to find in people the love and security which God alone can give to him. There are certain types of personalities even in holy orders who can delight, after a fashion, in vicarious evil while listening hour after hour as a man or woman confesses secret sins or deep desires. Holy ordination is no guarantee that one will be free from prurience! Pastors inclined to stress counseling opportunities must learn to make a godly use of their evangelical freedom by avoiding the occasions to sin in thought, word, and deed which will surely arise.

The Situation in the City

The city pastor often feels that his mission opportunities and approaches are limited in spite of the teeming thousands who surround him. Many live in apartments whose main attraction is privacy and freedom from any type of intrusion. Many move about so frequently that they fail to establish spiritual roots of any kind anywhere. Some are held so tightly in the deadly grip of sin and vice that they can be freed only by a signal act of God's judgment and grace. Every contact and opening is precious in the inner city.

Do we realize the full implication of the Pauline injunction that "it is required in stewards that they be found trustworthy?"⁸

Counseling alone, apart from the ministry of Word and Sacrament, can lead to a preoccupation with man and even with sin which is barren and potentially destructive to pastor and parish. When this danger arises we must remember the Pauline advice to "take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."⁹

II. THE COUNSELOR AS PASTOR AND PERSON

Contacts in the City

Many clergymen in our land will have to possess stronger faith and more certain knowledge before they will be able to accomplish lasting Christian results through their counseling. They need the conviction of the Apostle Paul, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"¹⁰

Thank God when our own beliefs and convictions are true and sound! There is, however, another vital factor which is involved in counseling situations in the city. There will be slight opportunity for such work if the pastor's own personality, preaching, and bearing are such as to repel people rather than attract them. People can choose their own friends and social circles in the city. They can also, to an amazing extent, choose their own churches and pastors even in a denomination which is as tightly knit and unified as is

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The downtown church, and pastor, is in a rather unique position in the church of our day.

It is always interesting to find out, if we can, how and why people happen to come to us. There are even occasions when strays and unbelievers from "out of nowhere" somehow manage to seek us out. . . .

Contacts secured from paid church advertisements represent providential and God-given opportunities to confront people with God's Word and the life which is lived within His holy Church. As a matter of fact, however, most city pastors would probably say that such contacts are not as frequent or as numerous as one would expect. . . . Interestingly enough, it appears as if the city telephone book and classified directory are by far the most fruitful sources of calls and contacts. These bulky volumes, and the hotel church directories, have brought many people to the church and have even resulted in contacts which developed into true Christian counseling situations.

The Man and the Message

The preacher in a city church has special reason to pray for divine grace, ability, and power in the pulpit. He should spend much time in studying his text, writing out his sermon, and preparing to deliver it. There should also be time on Saturday afternoon for careful reading and consideration of the propers and the prayers for the forthcoming services. Many pastors do not realize the teaching potential in the liturgy. There may even be times when you will feel constrained to refuse outside assignments in order to do real justice to the primary task in the local parish. The amount of pastoral counseling which will come your way will be increased if your message and manner at the altar and in the pulpit are such as to bring divine truth through the medium of your own voice and person.

An emphatic message and manner is God's way of using the preacher for the more personal application of the Word which is made possible in a counseling situation. Most people in the city are terribly lonely and in need of friendship and understanding. Their normal human needs and drives often lead them into sinful places and situations. The pastor must, somehow, present a message and a bearing which is winsome and inviting to further contact with God, His holy Word, His minister, and His Church on earth. People simply do not realize that the hungers and needs which would lead them to taverns, to excess in drink, and to sinful companionship will really be satisfied only by God in the fellowship of His people.

Pulpit and Pew

St. Paul could say, "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."¹¹ Christian truth in the Scripture will indeed give every true sermon a note of authoritativeness and finality.

Indeed, the confessional Lutheran must ever be conscious of his divine office and speak in the prophetic and apostolic manner of "Thus saith the Lord" and "It is written!" The willingness of our laity to receive the Word from our lips should make us doubly sure that what we preach *really is* the divine truth of Almighty God. It is truly humbling for us when we consider the respect with which the laity continue to receive our sermonic efforts.

There are also instances in which hardened and sophisticated cynics have been deeply impressed with the message of a faithful and convinced preacher of the Word. Such men and women have at times been deeply moved by the Word itself and thus are in a frame of mind which renders them receptive to further instruction and guidance.

Unfortunately, the Protestant pulpit today is generally considered to be a waning force and influence within American culture. Negative Biblical criticism, philosophical and neo-orthodox theology, and a conception of the minister which makes of him a friend and guide, rather than a preacher, pastor, and priest, have done much to dilute what ministers say and the manner in which they say it. . . . Some Lutherans have been affected by these men and movements—Tillich, Bultmann, neo-orthodoxy, etc. Much religious writing and talk today seeks vainly to cause people to think about God and speak much about Him without any real hearing of His Word and commitment to Him. Much on the modern religious scene causes doubt in the minds of our people and inclines them to question the Word which they hear from their pastor's lips.

Our People Counsel Us

Even the most faithful in our parishes may be inclined, at times, to "talk back" to us and question concerning what we said or implied in a sermon. We should not at all be afraid of one who is in this state of mind. It may very well open the way to necessary and profitable pastoral contact and counsel! Even the most negative statement or expression concerning a sermon or some point in it may be a heaven-sent opportunity for sorely needed guidance. There is also always a very good chance that our critic may have some legitimate question to ask or some fault and mistake to point out! Should a pastor ever complain if *he* is the one who is counseled or corrected?

After all, these people in our city churches have to make their way in a highly competitive and spiritually debilitating situation. City people need more than the average amount of intelligence and grit if they are to survive as self-supporting citizens and as Christians. Sometimes the clergy do not realize how the laity must fight and struggle to maintain their positions in a culture which is increasingly being shaped by secularism and by people who make no pretense of being bound by Christian standards.

Think of the upright young man who must advance entirely on his own as he competes with others who will stop at nothing in

order to cut him down or get ahead of him in business. Think of the Christian girl who works in an office where some of her female associates are more than willing to grant intimate favors to the "higher-ups" in return for little kindnesses or a raise in pay. Think of our seasoned older men and women who must still hang on to their jobs for a few years longer in the face of rising pressure and competition from a whole pack of young "eager beavers" who are anxious to replace them. Christians in just such life situations hear our sermons Sunday after Sunday in the city churches! Is it any wonder that counseling with them may often result in as much or more gain for us than for them?

Martin Luther speaks of the "mutual conversation and consolation of brethren" in Article IV of the *Smalcald Articles*. This blessed by-product of counseling is at times a heavenly source of wisdom, strength, and insight to the sorely pressed city pastor.

The Measure of a Man

The opportunities and demands of pastoral counseling are, in many ways, a significant test of the pastor as a Christian. Our clerical garb and collar give us status and assured position almost everywhere in America today. Our pulpit, altar, and vestments signify the godly esteem and support which are rendered by the people of our congregation. It is in pastoral counseling, with its free exchange of questions and ideas, that our faith in Christ and our obedience to His holy Word receive a real test. In pastoral counseling we are, in a sense, "on our own." Here we probably show most clearly whether our true faith and obedience is in the Christ whose Church and people we have been called to serve.

If the people in the city do not come to us for advice and guidance, is it always they that are at fault? Here, indeed, we must speak of one of the most evident weaknesses and danger spots in modern Christianity. City people are increasingly becoming alienated from all forms of organized church life and work. There are many times when the city pastor in America will ask himself what he can and must do in order to confront men with the God Who is their Judge and only Savior. The secular untouchables of our time do not seem inclined to hear and accept a call which comes from the representative of a church which is organized and self-sufficient.

Certain parts of the inner cities of America today are full of homosexuals, perverts, slaves to dope and drink, and other strange and lost individuals of the Tennessee Williams types. One cannot help but think of the words of Christ spoken over the hard-hearted and faithless Jerusalem of His time: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"¹² When many no longer listen, is it entirely the church that is at fault? There are aspects of life and work in the inner city of our time which are simply eschatological. Let us never forget that an abandoned and rootless people may be reaping the terrible judgment of God which they have brought upon themselves.

All the props are gone in a true inner city situation! One realizes what Christ meant when He called His people "a little flock."¹³ As one tries to do his work in such a place, you find that your own personal faith in the inner city milieu is very close to the situation which we find in New Testament times. The "post-Christian era" poses a unique test to the pastors who serve in this place and time.

III. PEOPLE AND LIFE IN THE INNER CITY

Knowing the Field

Well-meaning under-shepherds of Christ have failed in pastoral assignments because of failure to understand their people and the life that they lead. Christ's ministry should indeed teach us to adapt our approach to the people within their life environment. Yet, there must still be a certain type of reserve and detachment in a minister. We read that Christ "did not commit Himself unto men, because He knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man."¹⁴ This wisdom and stance is essential in the city. There are sinful and destructive forces at work within man with which the pastor had better be acquainted! Life often manifests grim and deadly forms in urban communities.

The Toll of the City

City life has taken a tremendous toll on the outward and organizational aspects of the Church. Congregations tend to slim down, merge, or even to disappear within swirling masses of city people. Some say that we must now organize "cells" rather than parishes. Sociological studies are available which list the number of Protestant congregations that have moved away, merged, or died within the last generation. The "population explosion" in America, and in the world, has not worked to the advantage of the organized church. Lutheran churches in some cities have made a record somewhat better than that of other denominations. In other places we are simply part of the general pattern of failure and flight.

The churning and deadly intensity of city life also affects the individual Christian. Any city pastor who has served for some length of time can give tragic and revealing case histories. There is something grim and debilitating about this life. It seems that God never intended that men should live so close together. Yet, it is the destiny of most modern people to live out their lives in cities. The church had better learn how to work with them. Sociologists now begin to speak of a "megalopolis" with all its terrifying connotations of bigness and danger and mystery.

A Church Without Props

Why is the city so hard on organized Protestant Christianity? Why is individual Christian faith and life so threatened by urban civilization?

In general, we may say that those natural forces and factors which support godliness and normal living elsewhere are absent in the inner city. Here we lack the beneficent influence of clear air, sun and sky, and the open countryside. Men see little of that precious and powerful natural revelation of God which spoke so clearly to our ancestors in Europe and in an earlier America.

People do not know one another. Normal human contacts and friendships have always fostered a certain sense of decency and of civic righteousness. Even gossip and the notorious "party lines" of rural areas serve useful social purposes in exposing and restraining some forms of evil. This type of cultural control is almost entirely absent in our cities of today.

Loneliness is undoubtedly the major individual and social problem. Family life tends to disappear. Urban redevelopment programs now taking place represent a brave new attempt to make it possible again in such a setting.

So far, however, we have not seen much evidence of normal and happy family and social life within the heart of our cities. We see mostly a vicious and deadly set of causes and effects. There is a whirlpool aspect to life from which there seems to be no escape. Transiency and "moving around," racial strife and turmoil, crime and delinquency, divorce and family disorganization—these and other factors and evils are both the cause and the effect of many problems of the city. We inevitably have situations which cannot help but produce the juvenile delinquent and the lawless gang, the odd-ball and the beatnik, the queer and anti-social individual or group living on the fringes of society. Young men and women sometimes speak half seriously of their living quarters as "pads." Even regularly employed people who are church members often develop characteristics of the city "type."

The Negro still finds himself crushed and pushed down to the bottom of the heap. Someday, someone will write the story of how it has happened that, so far, those who are the "last to be hired and first to be fired" have not turned to Communism. Communists are undoubtedly still trying to win the heart and manpower of the Negro community in America. It is one of the fortunate and undeserved blessings within our present situation that they have not been successful. I shudder to think of what a real depression period would make possible in this explosive situation! The nation and the church have yet to solve this problem.

The Case Against the Church

Many have charged the Protestant Churches of America with failure and faithlessness because of the inner city debacle. There is some truth in these charges. A humanistically oriented Protestantism has indeed shown its impotence in the city.

There is also an element of injustice in the position of some of the church's sharpest critics at this time. How can the churches and their leaders be blamed for the problems which have arisen

simply because of massive shifts of population which were beyond the control even of city, state, and national leaders? The inner city is now the frontier and principal mission field in the United States. We must approach our work with this realization. In some places, we must start all over again—chastened, humbled, willing to listen again to God's Word. Lutherans must, however, beware of that aspect of the liberal Protestant ethic which would instill a false penitence and sense of responsibility. Some of these things have indeed been beyond human control.

We would not for a moment try to absolve anyone from responsibility for those evils which really do stem from our sins and failures as Christians. Here our chief transgression is undoubtedly our tardiness in the work of racial relationships, especially on the parish level. How many of us, even now, are truly penitent for those situations in church and state which are the result of our lack of love and mission concern for our neighbor? Who can really blame our good brethren of the Lutheran Human Relations Association if they occasionally manifest impatience or even a little bitterness?

The inner city is a field ripe unto the harvest. Yet, it is not like a new mission field. The inner city reminds one of a field that has been scorched and "burned over." There are even portions of the field which seem to be "God-forsaken."

God's Judgment on the City

We should recall, not only Christ's tears over Jerusalem, but also His sharp rebuke of her unbelief and faithlessness.¹⁵ Such passages undoubtedly give insight and perspective to all who would have understanding of the true situations in our cities with their "asphalt jungles" and dens of iniquity.

It has always seemed most remarkable to me that modern Protestant writings have practically nothing to say about this aspect of our situation and task. When faith is weak we do not see unbelief for what it is. There are certain words and teachings of Christ which are seldom heard in our day. His rebuke of unbelief as the greatest evil, His designation of Herod as a fox,¹⁶ His warning against casting pearls before swine¹⁷—are these passages really as meaningless today as their neglect by modern writers would lead us to believe?

Acquaintance with some of the barbaric activities of the city will cause you to turn to such words of Christ and other similar passages in the Bible. You will probably not have direct contact with these phases of life—but you will surely hear of them as you counsel with your members and with other Christians. There are people living in the city who have truly hardened their hearts against God and who are full of hatred toward their fellow men. There is the crooked politician and the gangster. There is the male or female pervert who has turned away from church and who delights in causing believers to fall. There is the publisher and seller of pornographic literature. There is the dope peddler who "pushes"

his deadly ware among grade school children and teen-agers. Such people and activities, which impinge upon the lives of Christians, force us to take an utterly realistic and Biblical view of the situation in which we must work and witness and counsel.

Do not ever make the fatal mistake of trying to separate your concern for people, and your counseling with them, from your faith and your theology! Work in the inner city will give you a new appreciation of that which Dr. C. F. W. Walther deals with in his theological classic entitled, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. Faith in Jesus Christ, knowledge of His holy Word, the use of both Law and Gospel, and the insights which are given to believers—these will support and protect you as you work in a dangerous area. You cannot be a mere “organization man” or a “business priest” in such a situation.¹⁸ The deep insights of Law and Gospel are essential for your ministry and for your very life itself.

Our Sick Civilization

The inner city strips off all sham and pretense from churches and from people. We see now that the old sins and the new paganism have won the hearts of many who have had some contact with Christ. The situation in the inner city reveals the true story. Here we have many who have “fallen away.” The effect of the inner city on the whole church may slowly but surely bring about a revolutionary change in all our thought and work.

The throngs in the inner city contain not only the “fallen away” and the indifferent. Some of the people, and some of their leaders, are openly hostile to the church as an institution which they regard as privileged, proud, and useless. . . . How many have read and pondered these haunting words which were written several years ago by the Rev. Erwin Prange of Brooklyn?

The situation in our cities is going to get worse before it gets better. Today's suburbs will be tomorrow's slums. Today's suburban churches will be the inner-city churches of the future. . . . This is the supreme test of our faith as a church. If we fail to meet this challenge, then all of us must inevitably face the nagging question which so plagued Luther and Walther, “Are we really a church at all?”¹⁹

The Power and Promises of Christ

Christ's promise that the gates of hell will never prevail against His Church is a great source of comfort and strength to the inner city pastor. These truths are basic for the pastor who works, preaches, and counsels in the inner city.

The servant of Christ will thrill when he marks how God truly uses him, in spite of all his sins and weaknesses, in the building of His eternal Kingdom. For it is possible to discern the real and eternal Church with more clarity when there are so few “hangers on” and when it may be unpopular and even costly to be a

Christian. One notes how even those features of church life which have caused so many to chafe, and strain, and find loopholes—close communion, and a faithful lodge policy, for instance—are precious aids to discipline. These and other “hedged around the altar” help to set forth the difference between the church and the world and they frequently serve a most useful purpose when they bring individuals to us with their questions and objections. People do not prize that which is meaningless and cheap! Communion rules and lodge regulations are among our few remaining evidences of the ancient practice of permitting only those who were instructed and faithful to participate in the most holy part of the mass. The church in the future will probably reinstate disciplinary procedures for its own integrity and protection.

Preaching the Word of God, administration of the Holy Sacraments, catechetical instruction, missionary endeavors, pastoral and charitable work are the most important duties of the inner city pastor. The counseling which he does is intimately related to each of these areas of service.

Humility and Greatness of the Church

It is really a humble and unspectacular field, yet the inner city pastor learns something of what Christ meant when He spoke of His people as being the salt of the earth.²⁰ The great parables about the slow growth of the Church, the presence of tares, and the devilish opposition of the enemy also have peculiar relevance in this situation.²¹ Above all, the pastor in the inner city learns what Christ meant when He spoke of the “little flock”²² and the “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” who are called to the Kingdom.²³

In spite of all this, the true greatness of the Church and its size and permanence and power come into true focus. The words of Elisha often come to mind, for he said at a time when Israel seemed to be hopelessly outnumbered and overpowered: “Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”²⁴ A Christian congregation in the inner city has strength and security and drawing power which is possessed by no other group regardless of assets or prominence or wisdom. Indeed, it is often the humble and simple confession and life of the Christians which, just as in apostolic days, causes modern pagans to study and investigate the faith.

The Priesthood of All Believers

One learns to love this work and ministry. Pastoral counseling here has a thrill and a drive and urgency which is probably not possible when it is done in an easier, more artificial and settled situation. You are always conscious of the fact that this may be your last contact with your counselee—he will soon move again, or he is traveling, or perhaps he is not even a church member. You realize, in all humility, that many of these people who call or come would not even know of you or of your congregation if it were not

for the faithful witness and life of some obscure church member whom you scarcely know. For it is simple friendship, which is so rare and precious, which brings people to church more than any other factor. One Christian brings another who is a fellow believer, or, often, merely an interested friend. Here the priesthood of all believers is more than a doctrine that is believed—it is practiced to the extent that it is responsible for a major part of your pastoral counseling. The one effective means of contacting Jews, which I have found, is the friendship which they often have with our people through employment or social contacts.

How Counseling Affects the Pastor

The very nature and urgency of the contacts, and the questions concerning faith and life which are discussed, make it almost impossible for the pastor to do "non-directive counseling" which can stretch out endlessly. You must always be most scrupulous in preserving the seal of the confessional, yet you will find that your counseling will make it possible to preach the Word of God with particular relevance and timeliness. You will also learn, as you speak with the troubled and lonely people of the city, to appreciate the simple things which we are often inclined to take for granted: a Christian home background, your wife and children, your divine call, and the regular salary, house, and employment which is furnished by the congregation.

You think often of your own little flock. There are those who remain in it, who come or return to it, and who fall away from it. Your prayers often include members by name as you ask God to give them the help and deliverance which He alone can give. You know very well that the Christian church in America, in spite of all its wealth and position and prestige, may be sorely tested and tried in future years. The inner city church situation is full of red lights and warning signs! You realize that a church which takes too much pride in wealth and numbers has descended to a level at which it cannot survive in the fiery trial which the future may bring. You often recall that which sober churchmen and prophets of God have been saying to us now for some years. Consider, for example, the words of a church editor whose position gives him unusual perspective for reading the signs of the times: "It would not be an ultimate tragedy . . . if history were to pronounce its *quietus* on much of what now passes for organized Christianity. Christianity itself would nonetheless prevail. It would prevail because it is the work of God and not the work of men."²⁵

Joy in City Church Work

We who are in the holy ministry do God's work, wherever we may be. The work which is done in Christ's name in the inner city has special meaning not only for its own locale but for the whole church of Jesus Christ. . . . The means of grace are really all that we have. If we think we have more than these in the church, we

are mistaken. Whatever strength there is in our parish and larger organizations comes from Word and Sacrament. There is no real life in structures which no longer throb with faith, confession, and Christian life.

We see an aspect of life which can be grasped only in part by an "established church" and by "organized Christianity." Some of our times of greatest faith and confidence come, under God, when we hear of the victories of Christ's people and when we see with our own eyes how the Lord still overcomes Satan. As we preach and teach and work in the inner city, and especially as we counsel with all sorts and conditions of men, we see in somewhat clearer outlines the signs of that true Church and Kingdom which now is and which is yet to come.

FOOTNOTES

1. Sirach 38:1-4.
2. Helpful book: Granger E. Westberg, *Minister and Doctor Meet* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1961), 174 pp.
3. I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6.
4. Ezekiel 34:2-4.
5. St. John 21:15-17.
6. *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Dr. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 31.
7. *American Lutheran*, XLIII, No. 5 (May, 1960), pp. 21-30.
8. I Corinthians 4:2, RSV.
9. I Timothy 4:16.
10. I Corinthians 9:16.
11. I Corinthians 2:4-5.
12. St. Matthew 23:37.
13. St. Luke 12:32.
14. St. John 2:24-25.
15. Cf. St. Matthew 23:34-39.
16. St. Luke 13:32.
17. St. Matthew 7:6.
18. Cf. I Timothy 4:14-16; II Timothy 2:15.
19. "The Crisis of the Inner-City Church," *American Lutheran*, XLII No. 12 (December, 1959), p. 8.
20. St. Matthew 5:13.
21. Cf. St. Matthew, Chapter 13.
22. St. Luke 12:32.
23. I Corinthians 1:26.
24. II Kings 6:16.
25. "Hope in a 'Post-Christian' Era," *Christianity Today*, VI (August 3, 1962), 20 (1072).