

# Introduction - The Keys

Dean O. Wenthe, M.A., M.Div., Th.M., Ph.D.  
Professor, Exegetical Theology—President

Do you have a good physician? Our family is blessed with a physician who is knowledgeable, capable and personable. What is particularly appreciated is the manner in which he instructs the patient as he talks through every step of a diagnosis or examination. The respect he accords the patient conveys a sense that he has as much time as is needed to answer questions and be of help. What a blessing when people speak of being treated by a physician who seems to be rushed in fulfilling the needs of an HMO quota or other demands. The pressure in our culture to reduce a patient to a commodity has been voiced by many medical doctors.

Let me ask a parallel question: Do you have a good pastor? If there are pressures to reduce a patient to a commodity, there are similar pressures to reduce the Christian to a number ( i.e., a religious consumer who is to be the object of marketing and manipulation as intense as any that Wal-Mart or Wall Street might use).

Concordia Theological Seminary is committed to forming pastors who are knowledgeable, capable and personable and who possess a spirit of integrity, a mind with clarity and a heart of charity. This formation can only happen by God's grace as the seminarian defines himself and his calling by God's gifts of the Sacred Scriptures and Holy Sacraments. The good pastor-Scripturally defined-is a shepherd, not a salesman; an educator, not an entertainer; a pastor not a CEO. The clear and Scriptural doctrine, which he confesses, is, by God's grace, joined to a heart of compassion and love for his people. He visits them in their homes, at the hospital and enjoys their individual histories. Like a good physician, he lovingly warns them against the deadly thrusts of Satan-sometimes so subtle-and tenderly encourages them with Christ's presence in Word and Sacrament.

Two texts capture the beauty and the depth of the relationship between the faithful pastor and the people of God. First, a beautiful endorsement on "The Long Pastorate" is cited in John W. Doberstein's Minister's Prayer Book (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 210-211). While not every tenure can be as this passage describes, the attitude of pastor and people is worthy of emulation.

"One's heart goes back from this eager, restless, ambitious age to the former days, and recalls with fond recollection the pastor of his youth, who had lived all his ministry in one place, and was buried where he was ordained-who had baptized a child, and admitted her to the sacrament, and married her and baptized her children-who knew all the ins and outs of his people's character, and carried family history for generations in his head-who was ever thinking of his people, watching over them, visiting their homes, till his familiar figure on the street linked together the past and the present, and heaven and earth, and opened a treasure house of sacred memories. He prayed with a lad before he went away-his mother could almost repeat the words; he was constantly inquiring about his welfare, so binding him to his faith and home by silken ties; he was in the house on the day of his return, to see how it had fared with him in the outer world. People turned to him as by an instinct in their joys and sorrows; men consulted him in the crises of life, and, as they lay a-dying, committed their wives and children to his care. He was a head to every widow, and a father to the orphans, and the friend of all lowly, discouraged, unsuccessful souls. Ten miles away people did not know his name, but his own congregation regarded no other, and in the Lord's presence it was well known, it was often mentioned; when he laid down his trust, and arrived on the other side, many whom he had fed and guided, and restored and comforted, till he saw them through the gates, were waiting to receive their shepherd-minister, and as they stood around him before the Lord, he, of all men, could say without shame, 'Behold, Lord, thine under-shepherd, and the flock thou didst give me'".

The second text is from The Lutheran Hymnal, hymn 484. Note how the pastor's calling is defined in Scriptural categories by the people of God.

We bid thee welcome in the name  
Of Jesus, our exalted Head.  
Come as a servant-so He came-  
And we receive thee in His stead.

Come as a shepherd; guard and keep  
This fold from hell and world and sin;  
Nourish the lambs and feed the sheep;  
The wounded heal, the lost bring in.

Come as a teacher sent from God,  
Charged His whole counsel to declare.  
Lift o'er our ranks the prophet's rod  
While we uphold thy hands with prayer.

Come as a messenger of peace,  
Filled with the Spirit, fired with love.  
Live to behold our large increase  
And die to meet us all above.

May God provide each of you with a good and faithful pastor who reflects these stanzas in his shepherding. He will prove a greater blessing than the alternative models of CEO/administrator, marketer/PR person, therapist, etc. Our culture seeks to remake its religious leaders in categories comfortable and compatible with its prejudices. In such a setting, the church needs pastors who have the mind of Christ and trust His Word and Sacrament as they reach out with a natural delight in the people whom God has redeemed and compassionately confess Christ to those who are without the living Holy Trinity as the center of their world.

May God give us grace to form such good and faithful pastors, and may He prepare God's people to follow and support such shepherds.

---

© Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe. Used by permission.