

## Editor's Notes

In this issue of *The Hinge*, sisters Maggie Wellert and Margaret Leinbach examine the complicated issue of ministry in the local congregation and whether our traditional metaphors for ministry are helpful or harmful to congregations. Our authors argue that the current crisis in the ordained ministry (e.g. low clergy morale) and declining health in congregations is related to the way we describe the pastoral office. By changing the language and images we, we can change the nature of life in the parsonage and in the pew.

In particular, Wellert and Leinbach are concerned that in most Moravian congregations ministry is left to the ordained pastor who is seen as either the pastor of the flock or servant of the congregation. This either gives the pastor too much authority over the members, preventing them from developing into Christian maturity and responsibility, or it gives too little authority and autonomy to the pastor, leaving him or her to be abused by congregational demands. Instead of models of power and/or abuse, they propose a new model of ministry based on the image of the Good Samaritan.

In addressing this issue, it might be helpful to see that ministry has been a difficult topic throughout the history of Christianity. We see this in the variety of names that churches use for the leaders of Christian communities. The words "priest," "minister," and "pastor" each emerged to communicate different understandings of ministry. The early Moravians developed a different perspective on Christian leadership than that of the contemporary Catholic Church, but they

continued to use the title "priest" for ordained persons until the time of Martin Luther. It was Luther who made the idea of "the priesthood of all believers" a central doctrine of Protestantism, and most Protestant churches have rejected the word "priest" while still asserting that ordained persons fulfill "priestly" as well as "prophetic" functions in the church. Luther argued that there is no essential difference between clergy and laity, only a difference in duties. The rite of ordination identified a person as one charged with the proper administration of Word and Sacrament. As such, ordination made one a "minister," but questions about the nature of ministry have continued through the centuries. What is the status and role of the minister within the Body of Christ? Are all lay persons "ministers" as well as "priests"?

Pope Gregory I popularized the idea of priest as pastor or shepherd of a congregation, and some 1400 years later we still use the term to describe the head of a Christian community. Many Protestant churches adopted the word "pastor" because it lacked the theological implications of the word "priest." It describes the function of the minister rather than his or her status in God's kingdom. A "pastor" is a "minister" whose duty is to lead a congregation.

Since pastoring was a matter of function rather than personal status, Protestants emphasized education and training of persons before ordination. There was a gradual professionalization of the clergy, but not everyone was happy with this move toward a professional, educated priesthood. Over the

years many in Protestant churches feared that the priesthood of all believers was being lost as the professionalism of the pastoral office increased. It appeared to many in various Protestant churches that a new division had been created between clergy and laity. Clergy were the “experts” trained in the work of the church who were paid to do the “ministry” of the congregation. To counter this assumption, some pastors started referring to the laity as the ministers of the congregation. Twentieth-century models of ministry stressed the role of minister as “facilitator” of the congregation.

Sisters Wellert and Leinbach write in this tradition of critiquing traditional models and metaphors that may no longer serve their original purpose, and they have returned to the New Testament for insight in developing new language to describe the role of the minister. The image they have chosen is the

Good Samaritan who ministers without being consumed by his or her ministry.

We have responses from lay persons, pastors, and church administrators who offer critiques of this new metaphor; however, all affirm that there are problems with the pastoral office as we now know it. Whether the current crisis in ordained ministry is the result of faulty metaphors for ministry or unprecedented social and professional changes in the late twentieth century, it is clear that our authors have opened up an important point for discussion. Darryl Bell (Hinge 8.3) has shown that church growth and decline are related to clergy morale. We need to also ask if the low morale of clergy and the reluctance of talented young persons to consider the ordained ministry as a vocation a result of unhealthy and unrealistic expectations placed upon “pastors” and “servants” of the church? More important, can we as a church reform our understanding of the ministry?

## Special Notice

The Center for Moravians Study has agreed to take over the business affairs of *The Hinge*. The Hinge will remain an independent voice in the Moravian Church with its own editorial board, but the Center for Moravian Studies will make it available to all Moravian congregations in the future and will maintain the mailing lists. Send changes of address to:

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