

Willie Israel

Sisters Wellert and Leinbach have given us a valuable new look at traditional metaphors that are commonly used to describe the role of a pastor in relation to the congregation. A metaphor is a powerful figure of speech that serves to add potency and meaning to a message. However, metaphors by their very nature present a limited picture. A metaphor draws a distinct parallel between the image presented in the figure of speech and a single aspect of the concept described.

The traditional pastoral models of shepherd or servant as described by Wellert and Leinbach each form an incomplete, therefore unbalanced picture of the role of pastor in a healthy, functioning church community. However, I do not agree that replacing these two models with a third metaphor gives us the complete picture of ministry that Jesus intended. Discipleship (and as an extension ordained ministry) is a complicated issue. If we were to use any single metaphor to comprise all aspects of this calling, we would find ourselves in the unbalanced situation Wellert and Leinbach describe.

I shall consider each of the metaphors separately. The pastor as shepherd evokes an image first of the Christ who, upon seeing the large crowd, had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). This image appears again in John 10:11 where Jesus states, "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (referring to his crucifixion). Again in John 10:14, "I am the good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." It is only in the end of John's gospel (21: 15-17) that

Jesus passes the shepherding responsibility on to Peter in the admonition to "Feed my sheep. Take care of my lambs. Feed my sheep."

It is instructive to note the form the metaphor takes when Paul and Peter pass it on to the elders of the newly formed church. In Acts 20:29, Paul warns the leaders of the church at Ephesus that "after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock". Then in I Peter 5:3, that apostle admonishes the elders to lead "not lording it over those entrusted to serve, but being examples to the flock." If we extend the shepherd model to include in leadership the functions of protector and role model, we get a better rounded picture of what Christ may have intended in using the metaphor. A shepherd should be more than simply the leader and administrator of a church.

In the same way, we should look carefully at the implication of servanthood for the church, and for pastors in particular. In the passage from Matthew and Mark, Jesus is responding to his disciples' mistaken notion that they could acquire a favored position in Christ's kingdom by asking for the seats on either side of the throne. Jesus clearly describes the conditions of humility and servanthood under which greatness may be achieved. In John's gospel, Jesus takes on the actual role of a servant by washing his disciples' feet. After performing this service, he simply states, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17). Although Jesus advocates an attitude of servanthood, he never proclaims service as the only model for discipleship.

In proposing the Good Samaritan model for ministry, Wellert and Leinbach have described Christ's example of a simple and clearly defined model for the entire Christian community. As Wellert and Leinbach have pointed out, Jesus made no distinction between pastors and congregation in his instruction to his followers. Therefore we should look at every instruction that Christ gave as being directed not to pastors alone, but to all believers as followers and ministers of Christ.

At different times in the life of a congregation, individual members of the community may be weak or strong, hurting or healthy, empowered or disaffected. The dynamics of need will naturally flow and change. A community of believers should indeed minister to needs as they arise, without placing the entire responsibility of pastoral care on the ordained pastor. When the pastor is included as an equal partner in the work of ministry, the pastor finds his or her load lightened, and the members are empowered by being able to participate in the blessing of servanthood.

A shortcoming of the Good Samaritan model is that it could easily become a needs-based, committee-handled ministry. Ideally, each person in a congregation should be in tune with the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of his or her brothers and sisters, and, like the Good Samaritan's innkeeper, be willing to step in care for community members as it is necessary. The resulting give and take should result, as Wellert and Leinbach attest, in a balanced relationship within the church family, with Christ as the universally recognized head.

However, a normal congregation seldom presents an ideal situation. Members are

caught up in their own problems and activities. Even the best-intentioned parishioners are rarely able to see beyond the most obvious needs of their brothers and sisters. Without a person in the pastoral, or "shepherding" role, to discern needs, encourage growth, and bind the flock together as a unit, the community is at risk.

The other drawback of the Good Samaritan model is the danger of disconnectedness: of seeing a need met and a task delegated as a job completed. The continuity required for the daily needs and growth of each member of the church community requires an ongoing commitment and sensitivity to the welfare of the whole group that is inherent in the function of the pastor.

The concept of certain persons being set apart from the congregation as pastors comes from the early church's need for organization and cooperation. In his letters to the churches in Rome and Corinth, the apostle Paul addresses the importance of different spiritual gifts. In Romans 12: 8 he acknowledges leadership as a gift. It is not to be valued more highly than other gifts but is one to be used diligently. The pastoral epistle to Timothy, who has been placed in a leadership role at the church at Ephesus includes admonitions to "Guard what has been entrusted to your care" (I Timothy 6:20) and "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with patient instruction" (II Timothy 4:2).

In conclusion, I agree with sisters Wellert and Leinbach that a rigid interpretation of a pastor's role as either shepherd or servant can lead to an unbalanced and unhealthy relationship between congregation and pastor. Neither

model, taken by itself, can adequately describe an effective role for a pastor in a twenty-first-century church. However the good Samaritan metaphor is, in my opinion, equally limited in its adequacy as a descriptor for the pastoral role.

Rather than take a single metaphor as model, pastors should consider all of Christ's instructional images: to be like children, to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, to be fishers of people, and to be workers in a plentiful harvest. A pastor must constantly reassess the needs of his or her congregation; to

delegate when appropriate, to listen and advise, to give and receive care, to serve and be served, and constantly to remind the flock that it depends on the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Willie Israel has been a Moravian, and a member of Morning Star Moravian Church in Asheville, N.C. since 1996. She is now a candidate for ordained ministry from the Southern Province, and a first-year student at Moravian Theological Seminary.

Gordon Sommer

Readers of *The Hinge*, and the entire Church, are most privileged to receive a stimulating and creative treatment of the office of ministry in this paper. The authority claimed by Sisters Margaret Leinbach and Maggie Wellert from both personal experience and theological reflection is compelling. The dialogue on models for ministry they propose is timely and should be pursued not only in this journal but at all levels in the Church.

The call to MUTUALITY and ACCOUNTABILITY is particularly noteworthy. The recovery of the priesthood of all believers is a salient and enduring feature of the Protestant Reformation. However, the mutuality hereby implied is threatened in every generation by the continuing lay/clergy bifurcation and the consequent hierarchy amongst the people of God. The evidence is as diverse as who will offer public prayer (the clergy) to the inability of the Church to utilize fully the gifts of the whole people of God. The Church is always stronger and its witness more widely evident

when the distinctions between lay and clergy are minimized.

Similarly, the call to accountability is necessary if we rightly understand the nature and mission of the Church. Clergy will not abuse the privilege of their office when they humbly accept their accountability before God and the whole Church. The witness of the laity is strengthened when they feel accountable to the Body in their homes, their community and their daily work. Faithfulness to God is the first vocation of every believer, and a second follows: love for others. These commandments imply accountability.

However, the weakness of the Samaritan model proposed by the writers is inherent in that it is not parallel to the models they critique. "Servant" is a style of leadership transferable to other vocations/occupations (for example, it is often claimed by elected political leaders). "Pastor" is an identification of a career or office. "Samaritan," meanwhile, is