

Responses

Barbara Rich

I appreciated the sentence in the first paragraph of this document that states, “It therefore becomes the responsibility of the PECs to be proactive in providing the best preparation and education possible for approved ministerial candidates planning to enter the parish ministry of the Church.” However, as I read the *Expectations* the thought crossed my mind that I would have been scared to death had I read this piece as I entered seminary for my first year of theological education. I certainly had a “vital and living relationship with Jesus Christ” and a strong sense of call to the Christian ministry. I was a willing, but frightened, middle-aged wounded woman unsure of my self-worth. Having a strong sense of call but with little confidence in myself to pastor a congregation, I needed the whole process of education and experience in order to grow in confidence, self-assuredness, and ability to draw boundaries and make good judgments. The “servant attitude” was no problem, but the servant must also have a sense of expertise, a sense of authority, a strong sense of self-hood.

At the time I had no problem with understanding the concept of “moving on,” of uprooted family and broken and severed relationships. I had been through all that before I even got to seminary. Was there to be even more of that as my future in the ministry unfolded?

There are so many negatives in the fourth paragraph under “Spiritual Expectations.” “Termination” of a call, “inescapable,” “burden.” Perhaps “the burden of ministry” could be better expressed as the “awesome responsibility,” or the “responsible privilege.” It’s hard to find a sense of joy in these paragraphs.

In the fifth paragraph, can it not be said that the “pilgrim” is to make his or her home everywhere and anywhere, rather than has no home? Realistically, one must admit that in this day and age, pastors’ spouses have occupations that require them to stay in one area; therefore pastors request and are granted (often) calls to nearby churches. Clergy couples ask for churches close together. Clergy families purchase homes. Is it truly expected that “it is a demand, for which there is no compromise” that a pastor be open to pilgrimage? Yes, keep an open mind to Christ and His moving Spirit, but He may be calling one next door as well. Yes, Jesus commanded the disciples to go to Samaria and all the world to tell the good news. But he also told the woman at the well (John 4) and the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5) to go home to their own towns and tell their neighbors what Jesus had told them and done to them.

I certainly agree with the last four paragraphs of “Spiritual Expectations,” recognizing the importance of the authority of the Church, synods and PEC. I also agree with the four

paragraphs under “Pastoral Expectations,” but more should be said about the expectation and need for growth. Growth is a process, not necessarily found immediately in the first year theological student. One is not likely to be the same person upon graduation that he or she was at the beginning. Nor was I the same person ten years after graduation. Certainly one’s immaturity or lack of readiness needs to be weighed in the evaluation process, but “wait” should not be a closed door and growth should be encouraged and expected, especially after added learning and hands-on experience as well as council with one’s “presbyter partners.”

While a theological student answering a call to ministry may come to seminary with many gifts, intelligence and good grades, he or she may still be growing into “maturity in judgment and behavior.” There is so much more need for loving guidance and direction by those in authority, rather than judgment and rejection.

Again, under “Leadership Expectations,” I believe it needs to be stressed that candidates are learning to be “self-starters and self-finishers who can manage their time effectively.” Candidates are not yet ordained; candidates are students learning how to be pastors, learning what their limitations are through spiritual direction, therapy, and every course, exam and research paper. The last two sentences in the last paragraph seem to make a leap from candidate (student, intern) to mature pastor and skilled administrator. In between there should be included the expectation of the professors to the students and the supervising pastors to

the interns that they will teach and lead their apprentices toward expertise in their gifts.

Finally, I say “yes” to the “Denominational Expectations.” I value the confessional system of church government where the authority of individuals is like the authority with which Jesus taught; self authority, that is, a inner confidence, trust in the guidance of his Holy Spirit through each individual in the Unity. May the Church and all those in “authority” make sure that each candidate for the ministry learns and practices the “defining characteristics” of the Moravian Church. Clergy and laity disagree on many issues, in particular the interpretation of Scripture regarding modern day ethical issues. But we are able to pray together, partake of Holy Communion together, and sing together in love and respect for one another. We work at being true to our motto: “In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; and in all things love.” As devout Moravian Christian pastors, we aim to live that motto and to teach it to our congregations.

One last word: To be a part of the Moravian Church that one serves, pastors do make their home there, even though temporarily. They do find joy in the service to their Lord and to their neighbors rather than a burden. It is a joy shared with those in authority and who have more expertise, and the joy of the Lord in one’s heart. I believe this is a spiritual expectation to be constantly stressed, over and above any sense of burden, brokenness or uprootedness.

Rev. Rich is pastor of Reading Moravian Church in Pennsylvania.