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**Philosophy of Ministry Paper**

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**Personal Philosophy of Ministry**

**Personal View of God’s Calling His Servants into Ministry**

 I have been studying the experiences of many Christian ministers over the last thirty some years. As of now, I believe that there are Christians who have been mightily called (close to ‘dragged’) by God into ministry. A biblical example is the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 9:16). I, however, believe such cases are extremely rare.

 I believe God generally calls all Christians to obey the scripture and minister spiritually to other people (2 Tim. 3:16-17). However, God also specially calls some Christians to serve Him full time (Matthew 10:10, 1 Cor. 9:14, 1 Tim. 5:17-18). I believe in many cases God does so through an ordination process conducted by the elders of His true church (Titus 1:5, 1 Tim. 4:14, Acts 6:6, 13:2-3). I believe as of now my case belongs to this category of calling. I am now being examined by the ordination board of Evangelical Presbyterian Church. I will consider the completion of this ordination process as a verification of God’s calling me into full time pastoral ministry.

 I believe there are many ‘ministers’ who have wrongly thought that they have been called by God to do what they are doing. As a result, they may be actually doing something hindering the work of God (John 16:2; Matthew 7:15-23). For this reason, I believe it is a grave responsibility on the shoulders of the ordination board members to ordain the right person. I am now trying to spell out my personal theology of ministry, hoping that the ordination board members can have a more thorough assessment of me as a candidate for pastoral ordination.

 To put it more seriously, I believe assuming the post of an ordained pastor will put my soul at risk of receiving severe judgment from God. I would rather proceed cautiously in this process of ordination examination. 'Do not go so fast,' I caution myself. 'If I was a foolish businessman, I would lose money; if I was a stupid airplane engineer, I would cause some casualties but those people killed might still go to heaven if they believed in Christ. However, if I am an unfit minister, people who are supposed to be headed off to heaven will end up in hell and God will surely hold me responsible for that.' I told myself. I understand that such a thought is somehow in contradiction to the predestination doctrine of Calvinism embraced by the Presbyterian Church but I want to be upfront that I take the warnings of Jesus and God the Father seriously (Matthew 18:6, Ezekiel 33:8).

**God’s Servant Must Be Separated from Sinful Practices**

 I believe whenever we truly confess a sin with a heart of repentance, God will forgive us of the sin. (1 John 1:9) However, a person must have learned how to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to live a holy life (Rom. 8:4-6) before God can use that person to work full time to save souls (2 Tim. 2:21). This is important also because the enemies will speak against ministers who display bad conduct in order to destroy the soul saving ministry of Christ (1 Peter 2:12).

 In order to live a holy life, a pastor needs to start his or her day meditating on the scripture and praying before God. I usually have an hour’s time meditating on the scripture during my breakfast time. It works for me because it helps remember that the scripture is the spiritual food for the day. I then spend thirty minutes praying in the sanctuary. I prefer praying on my knees which helps me remember that He is the Lord and I am His servant. Many Christians believe the key in living a holy life is to be Spirit filled. However, different Christians have different understandings of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. One word from one of my past mentors has helped me greatly for thirty years: ‘To be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with the Word of God’. I believe a pastor needs the work of the Spirit to enable him or her to meditate on His Word and pray to the Father continually during the day, regardless of what activities he or she is involved in. His or her focus should be ‘to do the right thing with the right attitude as prescribed by the Bible’. He or she can pray for a lot of things but the significance of prayer to him or her lies in the fact that he or she can talk to the Heavenly Father who understands, encourages, warns, cautions, corrects, reminds and forgives him or her.

**Ministry Guided by Theology**

 The World Council of Churches in 1966 came up with a bizarre dictum ‘The world must set the agenda for the church’. I do not want to judge this statement out of the context but I want to be upfront in the area of ministry bottom lines. I believe the Biblical theology must form the bottom lines to guide our ministry. In other words, contemporary thoughts and methods not sanctioned by the Biblical theology must not be accepted. I believe theology guided the early church and the Apostle Paul often included theology in his letters (Eph. 1). For example, church ministry should not use any methods or partner with any professionals that do not believe human sin is a real problem and Jesus Christ is the ultimate solution. Similarly, no matter how we shape our worship service, the service as a whole must focus on the Father God as the everlasting Creator, Jesus Christ as the Savior who did walk on earth historically and the Holy Spirit as our present helper. A pastor must have the right theology in order to protect the Church from wrong teachings and practices (Titus 1:9).

**The Role of a Pastor in Terms of Biblical Metaphors**

 There are many books written to describe the work of pastoral ministry. However, I believe one of the best ways to understand the nature of pastor ministry is meditating on the Biblical metaphors that describe ministry. I do not think that the scripture uses metaphors for lack of better linguistic descriptions. I believe that the scripture uses metaphors because they are the best linguistic descriptions to show the truth regarding a certain thing. Therefore, one of the ways to understand the role of a pastor is to meditate on the combination of a number of Biblical metaphors regarding a minister. As a pastor, I am a shepherd of God's people (1 Peter 5:4), a God's servant (Mark 10:45), a steward of God's mystery (1 Cor. 4:1-2), an ambassador of God (2 Cor. 5:18-20), a gardener for God (1 Corin. 3:6-9), and a builder of the church (1 Cor. 3:10-11).

 Of all these metaphors, I believe the focus is on the last one ‘a builder of the church’. The reason is: all the other metaphors are not able to point out the significance of building up the relationship between the church members. The N.T. times and again emphasizes the importance of church members living with one another peacefully to form the body of Christ (John17:20-23, 1 Cor. 13, Eph. 4:11-18). We know that God will distribute gifts to different members so as to build up one another but we also know that immature Christians may use the gifts in a way detrimental to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:23). I believe one of the greatest tasks of a pastor is to make sure that different gifts are used properly for the good of the church (1 Peter 4:9-11). For this reason, I pray that God will give me a variety of gifts (1 Tim. 4:14) so that I may recognize the different gifts of different members and understand how they should work together (1 Cor. 14:18-19). The gift of discernment will greatly help a pastor do his or her job.

**The Role of a Pastor in Terms of Biblical Offices**

Two Biblical offices are closely tied with the role of a pastor, i.e. prophet and priest.
Firstly, the main duty of a prophet is to deliver messages from God (1 Cor. 14). A lay person can also preach as a prophet does but it is the pastor who should take up the biggest chunk of this job. Secondly, the main duty of a priest is to mediate between God and people (1 Peter 2:5, 9). A lay person can also mediate between God and people, like praying for people before God and delivering the blessing of God to people. However, it is the pastor who should take up the biggest part of this task. Therefore, the jobs like reading the scripture, preaching, praying and benediction should fall on the shoulders of pastors.

**The Role of a Pastor as Defined by the Trinity**

 As we are serving God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, it is important for a pastor to show that he or she is serving the Trinity. Firstly, a pastor serves God the Father who is the creator of all things. So, strictly speaking our scope of service is not just limited to a local congregation or the salvation of souls. The Creator God has the right to use us to speak to other people or direct us to do something not directly related to saving souls. However, most importantly, we should constantly educate people on the truth that our God is the Lord who created the whole universe. A pastor should take up the difficult task of relentlessly honoring God by reclaiming His ownership and workmanship.

 Secondly, a pastor serves God the Son who commands us to make disciples of all nations and teach people to obey his words (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, preaching Jesus to people is also our primary task. We know that the whole Bible is witnessing Jesus, so we can preach Christ in all scripture. However, the four Gospels should take up the leading role in preaching Jesus. A pastor should focus on preaching the four Gospels using the whole Bible. Besides directing people’s attention to Christ, we should also look upon Christ as the essential model of our ministry (John 14:12). From Jesus we have learned that a pastor should minister to the needs of people physically, mentally and spiritually (Mark1: 39, 6:12). A pastor should also take after Jesus to minister to all kinds of people (Luke 7:34). The focus of ministry should be preparing people for the Kingdom of God like Jesus did (Mark 1:15).

 Thirdly, a pastor serves God the Holy Spirit who empowers us (Acts 1:4) and directs us (John 14:26) to fulfill the mission that Jesus Christ has given us. Therefore, a pastor should heavily rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in the discharge of his or her duties so that people may know the third Person of the Trinity. This is especially important in the area of preaching. The power, the language patterns and the content of preaching must come from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4 and 13).

**The Difference between a Lay Person and an Ordained Pastor**

 All faithful lay people are generally called to obey the scripture and minister to the spiritual needs of people as a priest (1 Peter 2:9). Whatever an ordained minister can do a faithful lay person can also do. There is not much difference between a lay person and an ordained minister in this respect. However there is a significant difference between them that cannot be neglected. An ordained minister is called by God in a special way to become a full time minister and the special calling has been confirmed by the faith community. Such a calling will authorize the ordained person to take a leadership position in the faith community. The members of the community should respect that person's leadership because God is holding that person responsible for the conditions of the souls of the congregation. (Heb. 13:17) Therefore, whenever possible, lay church members should work with the pastor in any jobs regarding the caring of souls, especially in the administration of baptism and the communion, the preaching of the Word of God and the disciplining of disobedient members. These significant jobs should be taken up by the leader for the unity of the community (Luke 24:30, Acts 10, Titus 1:13).

**The Pastor of a Local Church**

 Now there are voices saying that Christian ministries outside the context of local churches are real churches. They stress the need of going out to the unbelievers, downplay the line between sacred and secular worlds, refuse to take an institutional form of ministry, encourage infiltrating unbelievers in their natural settings and starting churches right there. I do not want to downplay the importance of any Christian ministries. I had been involved with the Campus Crusade for Christ and participating in nursing home evangelism for quite a long time before I started ministry at the present local church. However, I believe local church ministry is the core Christian ministry because the creation of a faith community in which members gather together to love God and obey His command to love one another (1 Peter 3:9) is the ultimate goal of the Gospel. I am contemplating vocation ministry at a local church as such. I will encourage members to bring people to church so that they can be blessed and converted by the presence of God (1 Cor. 14:24-25). In short, gathering together to worship God and build up one another is biblical (Eph. 5:15-21). The scripture forbids us to stop gathering together (Heb. 10:24-25) but gives us pictures of what it was like when the early church gathered together (1 Cor. 16:1-2 and Eph 5:19-21).

 The scripture clearly shows that the existence of local churches with a certain level of institutionalization is needed. Some level of organization is needed for the division of labor for the good of the faith community (Acts 6). Paul even listed clearly the qualifications for taking the post of an elder or a deacon (1Tim. 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9).

**The Centrality of Preaching and Sacraments and Discipline**

 On the one hand I know that a pastor should be prepared to do any work (including mundane manual jobs) if needed to manage well the house of the Lord (1 Tim. 3:15). Mundane work may be needed to teach the truth to the people (John 13:1-17) like physically cleaning the building (Deut. 23:13-14) so as to glorify God and be a good example. Besides, pastoral ministry should also cover the comprehensive work of caring for people’s souls as modeled by Jesus Christ (Matthew 8:14-18). Therefore, a pastor is expected to visit members at their houses, visit sick members inside a medical facility, officiating at a funeral, etc. However, the centrality of the work of a pastor should revolve around three things: preaching the Word of God (2 Tim. 4:1-6), administering the sacraments of baptism and the communion (Matthew 28:19 and 1 Cor. 11:23-25), and disciplining the disobedient members (1 Cor. 5:1-6:8). Out of these three things, preaching the Word of God should be the central core because His Word is the life giving Spirit (John 6:63). The sacraments are signs and seals of real blessings but without faith the congregation will benefit nothing. We know that faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:9-17). However, in order to preach the Word of God effectually, a pastor must do two things. Firstly a pastor must spend most of his time and energy correctly unpacking the Word of God (2 Tim. 2: 15) and delivering it in a way that the congregation can digest (Heb. 5:11-14). Secondly, a pastor should model the truth that he or she preaches (1 Peter 5:1-4) so that whatever he or she preaches on Sunday will continue to speak through his or her life the whole week. His or Her sermons help people learn from his or her life; and his or her life gives power to his or her preaching. I believe this is the most critical part of a pastor’s ministry. In a certain sense it is like ‘Word becomes flesh’ (John 1:14).

**The Measurement of Success of Pastoral Ministry**

 The standard God uses to measure successes in ministry is different from worldly standard of measuring successes (Luke 16:15). Oden said the success of ministry is not measured by the size of a congregation but the depth of genuine hearing of the Word of God. It is so true. When many people were scrambling to follow Jesus, He did not think that it indicated victory in His ministry. Instead, He turned around and said to them, 'If you really do what I say, you are really my disciples.' (John 8:31) Sometimes a certain kind of people walking away from us would indicate that we had just successfully done something according to God's command. It happened to Jesus when he successfully delivered the truth regarding the mystery of His flesh and blood. (John 6:66) Therefore we should measure success by how much the people live out the Word of God (James 1:19-25) We should also measure success by the internal growth of love, not purely external anything. The Apostle Paul says that all the external demonstrations of spiritual gifts, prophetic preaching, miracles and charitable works without the internal love should be counted failures (1 Cor. 13).