

“The Training of Vicars Under Pastor Charles Westra”

Matt Hennig  
CH3031  
Professor Korthals

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What do you think of when you think of the apostle Paul? A zealous missionary? A man set apart by God to deliver the gospel to the gentile nations? We all know Paul's credentials. A man who violently persecuted the Christians and pursued Judaism with a zeal that surpassed other Jews his own age. A Hebrew of Hebrews. Yet a man who by God's grace was converted on the road to Damascus when the Lord Jesus appeared and spoke to him. A man whom God used as a tool to spread the gospel throughout the world despite facing imprisonment, flogging, stoning, beating, being shipwrecked, being left for dead, and danger from enemies within and without the church.

"What do you think of when you think of the apostle Paul?" If you could have asked young Pastor Timothy this question, how do you think he would have responded? If you could have been that messenger who delivered Paul's second letter to Timothy, if you could have seen Timothy take the letter with trembling hands and read through it with tear-filled eyes as he learned of Paul's impending death, how do you think he would have responded? My guess is that he would have spoken with glowing terms about Paul, his father in Christ, his pastor. He probably would have spoken of God's grace in using a godly man such as Paul to continually direct him to God's Word in times of joy and in times of hardship.

As one reads through the Spirit-inspired words of Paul's second letter to Timothy, he is struck by the way that Paul's love for gospel ministry prompted him to again and again encourage young Timothy with timeless pastoral advice.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us... Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus... Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed but who correctly handles the word of truth... Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart... All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may

be thoroughly equipped for every good work... Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction... But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.<sup>1</sup>

And so it is that God in his infinite wisdom and love provides his church with faithful men who with patient instruction help to prepare the next generation of pastors for the church. As God used Moses to prepare Joshua, Elijah to prepare Elisha, and Paul to prepare Timothy, so today God still uses veteran pastors to prepare young, aspiring pastors. This takes place in the homes of many pastors who are also fathers and who raise their children with God's Word as their immovable foundation. This takes place in churches as pastors set an example for the youth of the congregation with their words and actions. Perhaps the most common place where we see veteran pastors preparing the next generation is within the classrooms of colleges and seminaries where professors lead the students into the depths of God's Word. Yet there is another place where experienced pastors train young men for the ministry. A place where pastors help students make the truths of God's Word into a *habitus practicus*. A place where each student gets his own personal professor to help answer questions, to lead him by example, and to train him in the art of pastoral care. This training does not occur in the classroom, but instead on the battlefield. It occurs not in hypothetical situations, but in real life cases. The experienced pastors are commonly referred to within our circles as bishops and the students preparing for the ministry are vicars.

This paper will take a look at one of those bishops who helps to prepare students for the gospel ministry. Over the past eleven years, Christ Our Savior Lutheran Congregation in Columbia, Tennessee has served as the training ground for eleven different vicars – all who have served under the guidance of Pastor Charles Westra. Over those eleven years, Pastor Westra has

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:3, 15 & 22; 3:16-17; 4:2 & 5

touched the lives of all these men. With his words and actions, Pastor Westra has not only helped teach these men about ministry, but he has also modeled what it means to be a gospel minister.

Before continuing with this paper, several important things deserve mention. First and most importantly, this paper is not intended to be one that extols the work of a man. Rather, it is intended to give praise to our risen and ascended Savior, “who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”<sup>2</sup> Just as the cloud of witnesses of old encourages us in our sanctified lives to fix our eyes on Jesus,<sup>3</sup> so also the Christian witnesses who surround us presently encourage us in our daily lives as Christian soldiers. Secondly, as the author of this paper, I truly owe a great deal to the other vicars who served under Pastor Westra, nine of whom now serve as pastors of their own congregations. Without their work, this paper would not have been possible. This work is primarily based on their information and cooperation with rather lengthy questionnaires. Other sources include information given by members of the congregation and email correspondence that the author of this paper had with Pastor Westra himself. Finally, although this paper will treat historical events, it does not presume to treat them all in a chronological order. Rather, this paper will be primarily arranged by the different facets of the vicar program under Pastor Westra. Without further delay, we continue with the main body of the paper.

## “The Training of Vicars Under Pastor Charles Westra”

**Vicar Charles Westra**

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:11-12

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 12:1-2

In discussing the training of vicars under Pastor Westra, perhaps the best place to begin is with his own vicarship. As with many of the vicars who served under him, Westra himself entered his vicar year with some doubts about the ministry. He writes, "I entered my vicar year very unsure of my future in the ministry. I had many doubts about my abilities and a few aspirations to do other things."<sup>4</sup> Despite being unsure about the ministry, Westra's positive experience as a vicar played a pivotal role in influencing him toward continuing on in the public ministry. In fact, not only did his experience as a vicar influence his mindset towards ministry, it also affected the way he now serves as a bishop. When asked in an email, "In what ways did serving as a vicar under your supervising pastor affect the way you now serve as a bishop?"

Westra responded:

By God's grace and through his power, Pastor Ron Kaiser [Westra's supervising pastor during his vicarship] was a man of God. That showed through to me in all that he did. His firm, yet evangelical approach to ministry became a model for me. His love for God and commitment to God's word was a great encouragement to me. Much of what I learned from Pastor Kaiser I learned by watching him. I learned a great deal about working with people and encouraging people in the gospel to partner in ministry. I try to convey that to the vicars who serve here in formal and informal ways. Pastor Kaiser always made it clear to me that God wanted me to be in Colorado Springs. He took that very seriously and he encouraged the people to take that seriously. I attempt to do the same for our vicars. God has granted a great privilege to me and to our congregation. With that privilege we have responsibility. I pray for strength to address that responsibility faithfully.<sup>5</sup>

Truly it is amazing to see how the Lord of the Church continually prepares pastors of the next generation through those who have served before them. As Pastor Kaiser influenced Pastor Westra, so now Westra influences those who serve under him. Thus in his grace, our ascended Savior provides men who are humbled by the privilege to serve, who recognize the responsibility involved, and who are evangelical in their approach to ministry.

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<sup>4</sup> Westra, Charles, <cwestra@charter.net> "church history," 13 December 2005, personal email interview (13 December 2005)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

### **Pastor Westra – the Beginning Years of Ministry**

After having a beneficial vicar experience under Pastor Kaiser, Westra returned to finish his final year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In May of 1988, Westra graduated from the Seminary and received a Divine Call to serve as a Tutor at Northwestern Preparatory School. Two years later, Westra received a missionary call to Columbia, Tennessee to do exploratory mission work. When Westra arrived in Columbia, in July of 1990, he had a nucleus of five WELS families who lived in the area and who were at that time traveling to Rock of Ages Lutheran Church in Nashville for worship services.

Immediately upon arriving, Westra got to work spreading the news in the area that a new church was being founded. He sent out mass mailings, published adds in the local newspaper and handed out flyers. But perhaps most notable about his work was his extensive canvassing efforts. With missionary zeal, Westra walked the streets, knocking on countless doors, letting the people know about the new church and looking for every opportunity to proclaim the wondrous message of Christ to them.

After nearly five months of extensive outreach, Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church held its first church service in a meeting room at the Steeplechase Inn, a hotel in Spring Hill, TN. By God's grace, approximately 100 people attended that first service (thanks in part to a number of LWMS members who were in the area for a rally). Several months later (by Easter of 1991), the congregation was able to begin weekly church services. In fact, throughout that first year, Christ our Savior Lutheran averaged approximately seventy-seven souls per worship service.

From 1990-1994, the congregation continued to worship at the Steeplechase Inn. During this time, the Holy Spirit working through the Word continued to bring many new people into the church. By 1994, weekly worship attendance was up to 133 with the total number of

communicants at 135 and the number of souls just shy of 200. That final year at the Steeplechase Inn, Pastor Westra led twenty-eight adults through Bible Information Classes with all of them eventually joining the congregation after adult confirmation.

With God's continued blessings, the congregation had groundbreaking for a church building in August of 1993, just five miles south of the Steeplechase Inn. By mid 1994, the congregation finally began worshipping in their new church. During this year, the congregation also started a preschool to provide the children with a Christ-centered education.

### **Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church Becomes a Part of the Vicar Program**

Soon after the vicar in mission settings program began, several members of the District Mission Board and the Board for Home Missions suggested to Westra that he consider applying for a vicar. Westra in turn suggested the idea to the church council at Christ Our Savior Lutheran. Together, he and the council recognized the reciprocal blessings between vicar and congregation that the vicar program offers. Though the church council was willing to make an application, they considered their chances of actually receiving a vicar that year to be rather slim. With a sense of true humility, Westra writes about his thoughts when they applied for their first vicar, "We considered it to be a long shot at that time. I was thirty-two years old and not sure of what I was doing in the ministry. Why would they entrust a vicar to me?"<sup>6</sup> However, Westra and the church council's doubts about actually receiving a vicar were eliminated that May when Matt Doebler was called to serve at their congregation. Since that year, the church has called ten more vicars to serve under Pastor Westra. The list of vicars in chronological order is as follows:

1995 – 1996 / Matt Doebler  
1996 – 1997 / Kent Holz  
1997 – 1998 / Jonathan Schroeder  
1998 – 1999 / Jason Zahn  
1999 – 2000 / Jonathan Scharf

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

2000 – 2001 / Justin Cloute  
2001 – 2002 / Jonathan Kruschel  
2002 – 2003 / Harmon Lewis  
2003 – 2004 / Dustin Yahnke  
2004 – 2005 / Matt Hennig  
2005 – 2006 / Phil Huebner

What follows is a collection of various statements made by these previous vicars about different facets of their service as a vicar under the supervision of Pastor Westra. Interspersed throughout these comments are statements that Westra has made about his service as a supervising pastor for future pastors.

### **Spread the Mighty Word**

Evangelism has been a key feature of the ministry at Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church since it began fifteen years ago. With dedicated zeal, Westra has continued to walk the streets, doing door-to-door evangelism. One of the first new members to join Christ Our Savior, Pat Ashley, vividly recalls Westra making several visits to her and her husband's home. In a conversation with Pat, she fondly reminisced, "He walked the streets so much that he had holes in the bottom of his shoes... When we joined the church, we told him that it was because of his holey shoes." With a laugh, Pat continued, "We told him that it was because of his holey shoes but he told us that it was because of the Holy Spirit!"<sup>7</sup> Leading by example, Westra has endeavored to instill that same mission zeal in his vicars. After being asked what he would like to instill in the vicars concerning evangelism, Westra wrote:

I would like the vicars to work with a planned approach to congregational evangelism... It is my hope that the vicars experience many different calls. I would like them to do everything from a simple follow up call on a worship visitor to a formal law / gospel presentation. I would like them to see and understand the progression that may take place in calls on a prospect. I pray that I might model for them a desire to do outreach ministry and equip them to do it. I would want them to be familiar with the entire plan and be able

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<sup>7</sup> Ashley, Pat. <Recorded Over-the-Phone Interview> 5:20 PM, 18 December 2005



to make it their own. From mass mailings to computer databases, I would like the vicar to understand and have a “hands on” part in our outreach ministry.<sup>8</sup>

In correspondence with former vicars, outreach appears to be the area that they were most affected by Westra. Though not every one of the former vicars has retained the exact style of evangelism as conducted by Westra, nevertheless, nearly all of them indicated that Westra’s zeal for evangelism has served as a model for them in their ministry now. Pastor Matt Doebler summarized Westra’s missionary zeal as follows, “I always thank God for Chuck’s dedication to the Great Commission, which was probably his greatest influence on me. He never, ever gave up reaching out to the lost in the best way that he knew how. He had already been canvassing, following up, teaching BIC, etc. for years before I got there, and he never once showed signs of letting up. I have always been amazed and inspired by that dedication.”<sup>9</sup> As evidenced by the responses of the various former vicars and from personal experience, that same dedication and zeal has continued strong.

One of the aspects of outreach that Westra has continued to promote among the vicars and the congregation as a whole is door-to-door canvassing. In fact, every Wednesday evening from Spring until Fall, the members of the congregation have an opportunity to go out canvassing with Pastor, the vicar, and now the staff minister. Such “cold-calls” on individuals can be a daunting task considering the wide range of possible responses one might receive. But with Westra leading the way with his positive attitude, the vicars and congregation have continued to gain confidence in this area and most have found it to be very enjoyable. After being asked how serving with Westra influenced his attitude toward door-to-door evangelism, Pastor Jon Schroeder responded, “More than anything else, it made me do them... You just need

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<sup>8</sup> Westra, Charles. Email

<sup>9</sup> Doebler, Matthew, <doeblersmc@yahoo.com> “church history paper,” 29 November 2005, personal email interview (29 November 2005)

to get out there and make a few hundred outreach calls, and suddenly you start to feel more comfortable doing it. The experience of canvassing and follow up calls during my vicar year allowed me to hit the ground running when I was assigned as a mission explorer for the South Atlantic District. I didn't have to spend any time learning the ropes of outreach work."<sup>10</sup>

Promoting this type of evangelism not only among the vicars but also in the congregation, has instilled in the minds of everyone involved a mission-mind set along with a realization that such ministry is a joy. While serving at Christ Our Savior last year, I was typically surprised to see how many members of the congregation got involved in this type of ministry. It wouldn't be unusual to have a group of ten or more walking the streets every Wednesday evening. Moreover, this group wasn't limited to the staff or those serving on various church committees. It also consisted of teens and others who saw this as an opportunity to get involved in the church. Pastor Harmon Lewis recalled the emphasis that Westra placed upon training the congregation to do evangelism saying, "I remember Chuck saying once that canvassing was not so much about how many prospects you get but more about training your members to do evangelism on the whole."<sup>11</sup> Certainly over the years, Westra has trained the congregation by word and action to do such evangelism work!

Door-to-door canvassing, however, is not the only type of outreach that Westra trains his vicars to do. Instead, he instills in them the necessity of doing follow up calls; both on worship visitors and with canvassing prospects. During a typical week, the vicars have devoted two or three nights (not counting Wednesday night canvassing) to follow up calls. Following Westra's example, the vicars have used these calls to get to know the prospects and let them get to know

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<sup>10</sup> Schroeder, Jon, <jonschroeder@bigfoot.com> "church history," 1 December 2005, personal email interview (1 December 2005)

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, Harmon, <harmonel74@hotmail.com> "church history," 6 December 2005, personal email interview (7 December 2005)

them and learn of the church. Later in the conversation, or perhaps on a subsequent visit, the vicars would lead into a law/gospel presentation, most vicars using either a form of *Good News / Bad News* or *The Great Exchange*.

As with most of the other areas of ministry, Westra has over the years trained the vicars in the area of evangelism chiefly by example. When the vicar first arrives, Westra does not immediately send them off on their own to make follow up calls. Instead, for the first several visits, he takes the vicars with him so that they can learn from his example. During these visits, the vicar has an opportunity to learn from Westra's unique style of demonstrating to the prospects that he has a genuine interest in their life and using that connection as a springboard to a discussion on the amazing truths of God's Word. Pastor Yahnke notes that Westra's subtle transition to a law / gospel presentation was one of the most beneficial things that he learned while making such visits with Westra. Rather than awkwardly changing the subject to a law / gospel presentation, Westra would use questions that the prospect had asked to make the transition. For example, Yahnke describes, "if a prospect would ask what was the difference between Lutherans and Catholics, Westra would avoid getting bogged down with details and instead would use that prompting question to talk about the heart of the matter, namely Law and Gospel / Sin and Grace."<sup>12</sup>

### **Teach the Word**

A key component to the evangelism efforts of Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church is their Bible Information Classes. In the course of an average year, Pastor Westra and the vicar teach 2 complete Bible Information Classes. Often, however, they also have the opportunity to work with individuals who want to take the class but don't have the opportunity to take it with the rest of the class. By God's grace, in the fourteen years that Pastor Westra has been teaching Bible

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<sup>12</sup> Yahnke, Dustin. <Recorded Over-the-Phone Interview> 6:00 PM, 4 December 2005

Information Classes at Christ our Savior Lutheran, he together with the various vicars have had the joyous opportunity of seeing 210 adult confirmations following these classes!

To the vicar, Westra emphasizes the importance of BIC as the climax of pre-membership assimilation. In a conference paper that he delivered, *Building the Body of Christ*, Westra wrote, “In our evangelism calls we seek to share law and gospel. We also invite to our worship services where they continue to hear law and gospel. At some point in time we try to enroll them in a Bible information class. I see this as the climax of our pre-membership assimilation.”<sup>13</sup>

However, Westra does more than just emphasize the importance of BIC. Ultimately, he demonstrates the joyous privilege of teaching the class. The joy that Westra has in teaching these classes is contagious. Over the years, he has sought to let the vicars see BIC as one of the greatest joys of the ministry. Westra explains:

The BIC is one of my greatest sources of joy in ministry. I strive to convey that to our vicars. I want them to experience that joy. I want the vicar to see the incredible power of God at work through his word. It is important (in my mind) that the vicar have the opportunity to be connected to both BIC's during the course of a year. I also like them to have an opportunity to work one on one with a prospect in BIC. The process of encouraging and enrolling people in BIC is also something that I would like the vicar to see and experience.<sup>14</sup>

Personally, over the course of vicar year, watching the process that led up to BIC and then going through the class itself was one of the greatest joys of vicar year and something I greatly anticipate in my future ministry. During my first week at the congregation, Pastor Westra spoke to me of how amazing an experience it is to watch someone grow in the faith as the Holy Spirit strengthens them through the Word of Truth. He assured me, “Spread the Word, teach the Word, and be amazed at what the Holy Spirit does through that Word!” Soon afterwards, he took me on my first follow up call to a young family that had visited the church

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<sup>13</sup> Westra, Charles *Building the Body of Christ – A study of the assimilation of members into the Christian congregation*. Delivered at the Cottonbelt Conference, October 5-7, 1998

<sup>14</sup> Westra, Charles. Email

earlier. Through that family, I got to experience firsthand what Pastor said, “be amazed at what the Holy Spirit does through that Word!” Over the course of the year, both the husband and wife took the BIC. Watching them and the others in the class grow in their faith and understanding of God’s Word was truly an amazing experience. As Pastor emphasizes to his vicars, “be patient and watch the Word work.” After the lesson on baptism, that young couple desired to have their five-year-old son baptized. Without a doubt, one of the greatest highlights of my vicar year was the joyous and humbling privilege of baptizing their son. Certainly to all ministers of the glorious gospel of our Lord, what Pastor Westra emphasized is of the utmost importance, whether it be in Bible Information Class or in any area of the ministry. “Spread the Word, teach the Word, and be amazed at what the Holy Spirit does through that Word!”

### **Preach The Word**

Another area of the ministry that Westra has had an important influence on his vicars is in the area of preaching. When asked how preaching with Westra during vicar year affected the way they preach now, nearly all the vicars spoke of Westra’s conversational style of preaching that keeps the reader’s attention for the duration of the sermon. Pastor Kruschel responded that Westra’s style displayed the following points. “Talk to people, not to paper. Look people in the eye when you’re preaching law and gospel.” Kruschel continues, “Chuck is a unique preacher and has the abilities to keep people’s attention.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Pastor Doebler writes, “Chuck was very conversational in his style of preaching, and I believe that I have retained much of that. I always liked the way in which he was walking about and exchanging with people. Even though he was preaching, he created the sense of a dialogue between pastor and the congregation.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kruschel, Jonathan, <jpk@stpaulswels.org> “Westra Paper,” 28 November 2005, personal email interview (28 November 2005)

<sup>16</sup> Doebler, Matthew. Email

Other former vicars noted that they learned from Westra a clear style of proclaiming law and gospel, a style that they try to emulate. Pastor Scharf notes, “He certainly didn’t force a style on me. I think I learned more about preaching by having the privilege of hearing his consistent ability to distinguish and apply law and gospel week after week than by philosophical discussions about preaching style, etc.”<sup>17</sup> On a similar note, Pastor Lewis wrote about Westra, “His sermons were easy to follow, they were suited for his congregation, they were timely, and above all they were gospel. He has a natural way of speaking that makes you want to listen to him. He preaches like he talks and you don’t get the feeling that he is preaching at you. I strive to be the preacher that he is.”<sup>18</sup>

While Westra set a good example for his vicars to follow in his preaching, he also gave them a good deal of practice. Most of the vicars by the end of their vicar year have preached upwards of thirty different sermons. Through their practice, the vicars become accustomed to doing the text studies, writing and delivering sermons in a much more timely fashion than in the classroom setting. Throughout their sermon preparation, Westra gives guidance but does not interfere or dictate a particular style. Concerning sermon preparation, Westra writes, “I try to convey to them the importance of a logical progression of thought in sermon preparation. I would like for the vicars to do their work in the original languages and faithfully prepare to communicate with God’s people. I try to avoid changing styles... No matter what our style, we must be faithful to God’s word, faithful in our preparation and strive to communicate God’s truths in the best way possible.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Scharf, Jonathan, <scharfj@bellsouth.net> “Church History Paper,” 21 November 2005, personal email interview (22 November 2005)

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, Harmon. Email

<sup>19</sup> Westra, Charles. Email

### **Delight in the Word**

The training of the vicar goes beyond the normal realm of pastoral work. It goes beyond the evangelism on the streets, the teaching in the classrooms, and the preaching from the pulpit. Perhaps some of the greatest opportunities a supervising pastor has for teaching his vicars are outside his normal pastoral duties. If a vicar would observe his bishop doing and saying all the right things while in front of his congregation but then would observe him not delighting in the Word of Truth and applying it to himself, much of his formal training would be obscured. With joy all the vicars who responded for this paper could honestly say that that sad situation was not the case with their supervising pastor. Instead, they could rightly say that Pastor Westra continually demonstrated that the Word of God isn't just something you preach to others. It is something that you first preach to yourself and live in your whole life.

Many of the vicars who served under Westra commented on how his personal Bible study was something that he always began each morning with. "Personal Bible Study: he was faithful and encouraged me to be faithful. It was great to work under a man so connected to the Word. His passion for the Word was very obvious,"<sup>20</sup> recalls Doeblner. On a similar note, Scharf writes, "His example of being in the Word was powerful."<sup>21</sup> Yahnke emphasized, "We do well to follow his example. Begin each and every morning with an hour in the Word."<sup>22</sup>

This daily absorption of the life-sustaining Word of God not only reflected in the way Westra interacted with his congregation but also in the bishop/vicar relationship. In *The Shepherd Under Christ*, Professor Schuetze and Professor Habeck write the following concerning the relationship between supervising pastor and vicar:

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<sup>20</sup> Doeblner, Matt. Email

<sup>21</sup> Scharf, Jonathan. Email

<sup>22</sup> Yahnke, Dustin. Phone-Interview

In his contacts with his vicar the supervising pastor, motivated by his love for his Savior, will endeavor to display in a special measure those virtues which Scripture mentions as an outflowing of brotherly love... He will be understanding and kind, but also firm if need be. He himself will find a good example in the manner in which the Lord Jesus treated his disciples, an example which St. Paul emulated in his treatment of his understudy Timothy... The main matter is that the supervising pastor win the confidence of his vicar so that the vicar will feel free to consult him or unburden himself to him whenever he feels the need to do so.<sup>23</sup>

In similar spirit, Westra has won the confidence of his vicars, demonstrating to them brotherly care and concern prompted by the love Christ has shown to all people with his sacrificial death on the cross.

With his willingness to listen, with his genuine concern, and with his love for God's Word, Westra not only serves as a caring supervising pastor, he has also become a friend and role model for his vicars. Schroeder speaks of this unique relationship when he writes, "My time in Columbia was invaluable. Chuck didn't just teach me how to be a Lutheran pastor, he taught me how to be a Christian man. He remains a mentor in ministry to me, and a close friend. My ministry bears the marks of my service with him, and I pray that it will continue to do so."<sup>24</sup>

Scharf, who saw Westra both as a tutor and as a bishop writes, "As a prep tutor, he made it seem cool. As a bishop, I saw how fun the ministry could be. When I got out, his advice for a rookie pastor was invaluable. His friendship now is precious to me. I still value what I can learn from him."<sup>25</sup> In response to the question, "how has God used Pastor Westra to prepare you for the public ministry?" Lewis said, "He has not stopped. My members think that Westra is an oracle that I consult for advice and guidance. I suppose eventually I will have to stop saying, 'let me run that by Westra for some advice,' but I don't plan on it anytime soon. He is the logical balance to my emotional drive. For some reason you just want to be like Westra. WWWD? I

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<sup>23</sup> Schuetze, Armin and Irwin Habeck. *The Shepherd Under Christ*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989, pg. 380

<sup>24</sup> Schroeder, Jonathan. Email

<sup>25</sup> Scharf, Jonathan. Email



ask it every time I am about to react to a situation.”<sup>26</sup> With similar respect, Doebler writes concerning Westra, “He spent a lot of time with me, not just as a bishop, but as a friend, even though I was ten years younger than he. He opened up and shared his highs and lows with me. It helped me see that the pastor is a real person with real joys, real struggles and a real life. I enjoyed discussing Scripture with him, going to conferences, driving to visit prospects, etc. because he did a great job in being a friend and a brother as much as a teacher.”<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to note that so much of what has made Pastor Westra such a well-loved supervising pastor is not based on extraordinary things that he has said and done. Instead, it is based on his patient and consistent way of directing his vicars back to the words and promises of our eternal God whose Word cannot fail. In an age when the most esteemed scholars are those who develop something new and innovative, Westra is not afraid to point back to the same old truths of God’s Word. In an age when the craze is about developing the latest evangelism techniques to “win souls for Christ,” Westra is not afraid to, “be patient and let the Word work.” Pastor Schroeder summarizes this truth best when he writes:

As I stood in the sacristy before the service when I would preach my first sermon, Pastor Westra looked at his nervous vicar and said just one thing before walking out the door to begin worship. That one short sentence managed to calm my nerves, settle me down, and remind me of the great comfort that preachers have. He said, כה אמר יהוה. Those words that comforted the hearts of generations of prophets comforted a nervous vicar, and reminded him of the great privilege we have and the great promises God gave to those who proclaim his word.<sup>28</sup>

To our Ascended Savior who provides his church with leaders who direct the people to the Word of God be glory forever!

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<sup>26</sup> Lewis, Harmon. Email

<sup>27</sup> Doebler, Matt. Email

<sup>28</sup> Schroeder, Jonathan. Email

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