

The Pastor As Recruiter For The Preaching Ministry (In Search Of Timothy)

By Gary P. Baumler

I must confess that when I think of the assigned topic for this paper, “The Pastor as Recruiter for the Preaching Ministry” I feel a strong inclination to respond simply with an emphatic “YES!” You, as a pastor, are, or certainly ought to be, a recruiter for more pastors. You have the reason, the opportunity, and the responsibility to do whatever you can to get qualified young men at least to consider studying for such an important position in which, by the grace of God, you happily find yourself.

But I suppose, that is not really the issue. What pastor here would be so crass as to say that he does not care about where the next generation of pastors will come from? Who among us is not always ready to encourage a young man who has the gifts and perhaps the inclination for entering the preaching ministry? At issue, however is the question as to how much and specifically what the pastor can and should do for the cause. Perhaps there is even a question as to the advisability of using the term, “Recruiter” which leaves someone of my vintage with visions of Uncle Sam pointing sternly out from a poster declaring, “I want you!” and a tough marine sergeant close by to back up the claim.

Recruitment for the preaching ministry I think, has been at times misunderstood and maligned. Some, at one extreme, seem to discount it altogether. Others, conversely, seem to think that getting a boy—any boy—to say he will study for the ministry, automatically means he will and must be a minister.

The truth, I am convinced, lies somewhere between those extremes. Just where, for you as a pastor, is what this paper will attempt to explore. As a recruitment officer for our pastor-training college, Northwestern College, the appeal I make is for you, the pastor, to help us “In Search of Timothy.”

I. God Provides. He Uses Men to Help Carry Out His Provisions. From the beginning we need to keep one thing perfectly clear. We are not talking here about any one of us making any young man become a minister. We do not create ministers. God does. We could not, if we wanted to. Only God can turn a poor miserable sinner—God’s enemy by nature—into his ambassador and spokesman to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. If we never encourage anyone to enter the preaching ministry, God would still arrange to get the Word out, even if he had to call on the very stones to witness in the name of Christ.

Just as surely, however we tempt the patience of our merciful God when we have the opportunity, the ability, and the means to promote the preaching ministry among our young people and we do nothing—assuming that God use the stones, if he wills. God has never excused us human beings from responsibilities to him and his work on the grounds that he can get along without us. God has, on the other hand, in spite of us, with our miserable failings, often used human beings as his tools in the building of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

We do not bring people to faith, but we preach and teach the Word that does work faith. We do not decide where men must serve when they are preachers, but we make up call lists, suggest names, and advise when it seems helpful as men are placed or replaced from time to time. Similarly, we do not determine who will become a pastor, but we preach, teach, counsel, encourage, and do other things that God may use as he makes that determination.

When we look for Biblical precedents in this respect, however, one is first of all awe-struck by the direct intervention by God in each case. Beginning with Noah, the earliest man that Scripture associates directly with preaching, God communicated his will personally. God called Moses from a burning bush. Isaiah had a vision, The Word of the Lord came to Jonah. The Lord Jesus himself told his Disciples that he would make them “fishers of men.” Saul (Paul) was struck blind and heard the voice of Jesus.

Times have changed! Not many here today are likely to claim that such miraculous communication with God led us into the preaching ministry. No visions, no angels, no voice of God, no burning bushes, or sudden blindness prompted us to study at Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. There is one constant in all of this however. We all became preachers because of “the Word of the Lord.” Without God’s Word at work, no one ever entered the preaching ministry as a faithful pastor. It’s just that today we have that Word in its final revealed form God usually doesn’t use a miraculous kind of personal communication any more. Not that God doesn’t still perform miracles. The greatest miracle in providing pastors for his Church still is—as we have already suggested—that any one of us is a pastor.

The miracles, the *theophanies*, stick in our memories. Still a closer look shows that God also made frequent use of human agents, often other ministers, in the process of bringing those he chose into the work. Moses, at the Lord’s command, chose Joshua to be the next shepherd of Israel. Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha to indicate that the Lord wanted him to become a prophet to replace Elijah. Andrew brought Peter to see Jesus the first time. Philip brought Nathanael (Bartholomew?). The miracle of Saul’s conversion was complete only after Ananias came to him.

Perhaps the most striking example, however, is the one that gave rise to the theme, “In search of Timothy.” In Timothy’s case we know of no direct appearance by God that led him to become a pastor. We are told of human influences that helped, however. It all began when his grandmother and mother taught Timothy the Word of God as part of his earliest training. That training had its effect, and Timothy grew up as a disciple of Jesus. Then, when the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey came to Lystra where Timothy lived, we learn, “The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.” When Paul heard of this dedicated young man, he “wanted to take him along on the journey.” (Cf. Acts 16:1-3) Here was a pastor Paul encouraging a gifted young man, Timothy, to get involved with the preaching ministry. What became of this encouragement is well-known biblical history.

This is how I see us, as preachers on a missionary journey (whether or not we ever serve more than a single parish) looking for opportunities to find some young man like Timothy whom we would like to take along on the journey. Is it, too much to expect?

II. God sets Standards. Men Should Judge by His Standards.

But now someone likely will be quick to point out that Paul did not just ask, any young man who came along to join him. He saw some special attributes in Timothy. It was obviously important that “the brothers...spoke well of him (Timothy).” Timothy, in Paul’s estimation, would make a good pastor.

So also we, “In Search of Timothy” today, should exercise a sanctified degree of selectivity. God has provided certain standards by which we can identify potential ministerial candidates. Lets

use them. The purpose is not so much to weed out those we may conclude are not-so-good candidates as it is to make sure we notice those who are, and pay some attention to them on this score.

Paul's Timothy had two things going for him from the start: he was weaned on the Word of God and he had earned a good report among his fellow believers as a faithful Christian. Undoubtedly you have young men like that also in your congregation. But have you noted who they are? Have you ever- asked any of them to "come along on the journey" with you, i.e., to consider becoming a pastor in Christ's Church?

Two basic attributes we can look for in the young man we should encourage are, then, a firm foundation in God's Word and exemplary Christian character and conduct. Often such a foundation will result first from a good home influence in Bible training as with Timothy from his mother and grandmother. It will become evident in and be strengthened further by the available agencies in the church such as Sunday school, Christian day school, Catechism class, young peoples' society, etc. The young man will likely display an active interest or zeal also for the Bible or the church or missions, the kind of interests that will surely add to his "good report among his fellow believers."

Those two qualities already tell a lot about a boy and how suitable he might be for the preaching ministry. There are, however, other guidelines we can use as well. The Apostle Paul himself has, by inspiration, given us quite a list of characteristics important for a pastor. And although some of them are not measurable in a man's youth, e.g., "the husband of but one wife." others may become evident at an early age, e.g. "temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome." (Cf. 1 Ti 3:1-7 NIV) When we see a young man who begins to exhibit these qualities along with the above we should recognize that there is someone who might make a good pastor. We should see to it that he is made to think of that possibility also.

But now there is one qualification that deserves our closer attention, namely, the ability to teach. I choose that one because it comes as close as any biblical directive to demanding some degree of academic excellence on the part of a pastoral prospect. Someone "able to teach" must first be able to be taught. A good teacher will be a good learner, particularly in the subject matter he must teach.

This, of course, is an intangible quality and difficult to measure, particularly in the younger years. Nevertheless, we in the Wisconsin Synod have seen the necessity to give a thorough training to our pastor-candidates which demands some inherent intellectual abilities in them. "In Search of Timothy" then we need to look for young men with those abilities.

Some, unfortunately, have interpreted that to mean, however, that we only want intellectual wizards and high-powered scholars studying for the ministry in our Synod. I would hope that we would all know our own weaknesses well enough to realize that is simply not the case. Others, to the contrary, seem to feel that we should not set any academic standards that might discourage or disqualify any young man who feels he wants to be a pastor. How that can be and we still remain faithful to God's directives escapes me.

Where do we draw the line then? How can the pastor as recruiter know whether a boy has the intellectual gifts one should have to be effective in the preaching ministry? If it seems to you that this question has been slow in coming, you may be right. It's not an easy question to answer. We can offer a general rule-of-thumb, but please don't take it as some kind of a papal pronouncement. Please do not either look for this paper to be a defense of curriculum or teaching methods. When talking about intellectual gifts for the ministry, it clearly becomes a temptation to focus on the system of education in pastor training where we exercise and test those gifts, but that is outside of the present subject.

What the pastor as recruiter needs to know is how the prospective pastor will fit into the system as it is. Can he make it? The rule-of-thumb is that the average student who is highly motivated and applies himself well can make it. The problem that remains is that there are so many variables. The average student coming out of one system may be above average in another system or vice versa. Some highly motivated students who try to apply themselves do not have the discipline or concentration necessary to follow through effectively. Then again above average students who don't apply themselves might struggle. Nevertheless, in practice, there are students with only average abilities who go through NWC and WLS and become fine pastors. You should realize, furthermore, that it is rare that Northwestern feels constrained to deny a young man entrance based on his poor high school academic record. It happens, but in such cases the student has not produced anything close to average work.

This—you may have guessed—is a sensitive area in some cases. And it's a good place to give a word of caution. Just as we noted earlier that God produces the pastors, not we ourselves, so also we can easily misjudge who may be a "Timothy" and who not. We may recruit someone who appears to be a prime candidate who doesn't follow through for any number of reasons. Or we may feel someone is ill suited for the ministry who, in spite of our bad judgment, follows through and becomes a dedicated pastor. It seems even the Apostle Paul made that kind of mistake about a young man named John Mark and was later glad to see that he was wrong about Mark.

We have a lot of gifted boys in our congregations. You, the pastor, have a unique opportunity to find who they are and to encourage the ministry for them. The earlier you can show an interest the better, but surely during the age of Catechism instructions you will seize the opportunity. There you see them in action personally working with God's Word and you will know when there is one or another you want to come along on the mission journey with you. i.e., share the joys of the preaching ministry that you have known.

III. God Provides Means. Men Should Use the Means He Provides. Paul, of course, had a distinct advantage as a recruiter. He could take young Timothy with him on the missionary journey for on-the-job training, and Timothy was ready and able to go. Most of us don't have such ideal circumstances.

That doesn't mean, however, that we can't also get a young man involved in the church work so he will feel and be closer to the workings of the preaching ministry. There are opportunities, particularly as the young man matures in his high school years. It can be something as simple as ushering or as demanding as helping teach, and then teaching Sunday School. In connection with the youth group, you can personally guide a fellow so he can prepare and conduct a devotion for the meeting or help direct a Bible study. Few things might make a more lasting

impression on the youth than the privilege of visiting some shut-ins or being a part of an evangelism effort. There is “on-the-job” work the youth can do.

But now, before we become guilty of trying to build a bridge by starting in the middle, let’s turn back to the Word of God again and establish a solid approach if we can. That approach can be simply put in recruitment terms. It is this: you will make the best possible recruiter for the preaching ministry by you yourself being the best possible minister. That has many ramifications and practical applications. But most of all it has firm Scriptural support.

Look at the Ephesians passage (4:12 NIV) which tells why Christ made each of us pastors, namely, “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” It would clearly be wrong to suggest that the passage means we are to prepare God’s people to enter the preaching ministry. The Word has a much broader application than that. We are to be training all God’s people, as we are able, to do works of service to build up the body of Christ, the Church. Nonetheless, that is still directly to the point. When a pastor is doing his utmost to prepare the people of God “for works of service,” it is obviously but a small step for the pastor to suggest and, more important, for a young man to realize that that service might be full-time in the preaching ministry.

In practice here are some advantages as they pertain to recruitment. Some are obvious, but in the interest of completeness we should try to think of a large sampling. To begin with, the pastor who is truly absorbed in the work of teaching others to serve the Lord, will be putting his best foot forward as a minister. He will—you will—show your people that the work you are doing and guiding the to do is the greatest work on earth. You will demonstrate a personal interest in them as God’s servants and a sense of joy that you, too, are counted a servant. You should be the model with which others will identify when it comes to being a servant of Christ. Nothing speaks louder than the attitude you yourself display toward the work and, in turn, toward those you want to share in the joys of doing the work of serving Christ and building up his Church.

To accomplish your responsibilities as a pastor, your primary duties are to preach and teach God’s Word. Once again, it is through the Word that God’s Spirit works and moves the hearts of some young men to study for the ministry. Over and over again God in that Word calls for faithful service from his people leaving you with countless opportunities to promote also the full-time service that is the pastor’s privilege.

Many times you are called upon to lead God’s people in prayer. One of the things Christ has told us to pray is for workers for the harvest of souls on earth. Keeping in mind that “the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (Jas 5:16 NIV), pray fervently for workers. Pray that God might use you as an instrument to find more workers as we continue, “In Search of Timothy.”

Once we as pastors, have done and are doing these things faithfully, God has given us any number of practical means whereby we can be involved further in the earthly process of recruiting. We can, as we noted, get the youth active in service. We can make a special effort to buttonhole young prospects to make sure the idea is planted in their minds. We can serve as God’s representatives to do what he once did from a burning bush and again in a vision with Isaiah i.e.,

we can listen to (after soliciting) the objections the young men may have toward being a pastor and we can give God's own answer to those objections. We can tell about the unparalleled mission outreach into which God has led our church body. We can introduce the young people to our pastor-training schools, and explain that a person doesn't have to be or to become a so-called "Holy-Joe" to study at them.

When it comes to the schools, try to make use also of what we can offer you from the schools. We have brochures and pamphlets and are developing more such materials that can help promote the ministry and introduce Northwestern. We welcome visits, if you can bring your young people to the campus. For specific prospects, we can usually arrange overnight lodging and even provide meals to give them a better "feel" of the campus life and let them meet some of the students on campus. Often a special event (concert, play, sporting event) can be a part of such a visit. When we can, we are also happy to bring the campus to you, as it were. As much as possible, we involve the Northwestern College students to tell about studying for the ministry at the school and even to entertain at times. We at Northwestern have a mailing program, too. If you give us the name of a prospective pastoral student, we will write to him and see that he gets regular mailings through the year, particularly the high school years.

Here again, however, there seems to be some room for cautions if not for entreaties. As the list of things you might do as a recruiter for the preaching ministry grows, there becomes a distinct possibility of a kind of an "overkill" syndrome setting in. I don't mean, necessarily, that you can "oversell" the idea of serving God full-time. But you can make a prospective young man feel "pushed" and even "cajoled" to become a minister. At that point your efforts, humanly speaking, may become counter-productive. Remember, too, that a proper dividing of Law and Gospel also is necessary here. So we need to be careful and to evaluate each situation, since each person will react in his own way.

The second caution that fits here is to remember always that your recruitment efforts are for the ministry, not for Northwestern College. Northwestern comes into the picture because it's the primary means we have available to prepare for the Seminary, but the goal of the ministry should always supersede every thought about the school. In that connection, then, it should be said, beware of any biases you may hold against Northwestern as reasons not to recruit for the ministry. Rather tell us your bias and see whether we can help allay it or at least try to improve. You don't have to paint the college as a paradise—we don't pretend it is—but you should give the ministry its due consideration.

So, in time you will have found a "Timothy" and he will enroll at Northwestern College. That seems to mark the search as successful and you can be searching for still others, but it does not conclude what you can do for recruitment with the young man at school. Remember, many of the students at NWC are still very much unsure of actually becoming ministers. Just as Timothy needed the letters of encouragement and direction from Paul so do our students need continued encouragement from you, a personal encouragement. That can come in the form of contact (more than a greeting at the church door) when he is home and of letters and bulletins while he is at school. How much contact and what kind clearly is a subjective matter. Some of our students don't really care. Nevertheless, consider this appeal: In a recent survey of students at Northwestern College (whose pastors were not also their parents) **one** out of every **two** replied he would like to

hear from his pastor **more often**. Almost one out of every three claims he **never** hears from his pastor at Northwestern. Statistical variables notwithstanding, many students feel better about studying for the ministry and staying with it when their home pastors take a continued interest in them.

IV. God Responds to Faithfulness. Let Us Men Be Faithful.

God tells us to “be faithful,” and invariably He adds the promise of reward to follow. The immediate reward of continued faithful recruiting for pastors on the part of our pastors will be more young men studying for and entering the preaching ministry. Experience seems to bear that out. And again some of the figures from our survey support the conclusion. 41% of the students (again not including those whose pastor is also their parent) at NWC feel that their pastor **was the first or second greatest influence** (human) in getting them to study at NWC for the ministry. Almost **two** out of every **three** students would like to see more or even much more encouragement for the ministry than their pastors gave them. And although this second figure merely reflects a student’s idealism in many cases, it clearly says that a solid majority of ministerial students today feel that the pastor’s influence is very important.

Students, you may recall, tend to be very critical. One does not, therefore, necessarily look for a lot of bouquets when conducting a survey of the kind I have been using for reference. Contrariwise, unsolicited compliments sometimes have special meaning for the same reason. With that understanding I should like to close this probing “In Search of Timothy” with a comment one of our “Timothies” made on that survey:

“Though my pastor doesn’t write regularly or always seek me out to talk about NWC and the ministry, his general attitude helps tremendously. He was quick to encourage me to return to NWC in ‘76-‘77 even though I didn’t. So his attitude speaks more than all the letters he could ever write to encourage me.” Incidentally, this student felt he would like to encourage others to be pastors **more than** his pastor encouraged him.

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