

# What Congregations Can Do to Help Their Called Workers Bear the Burdens of the Ministry

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It is the nature of the Body of Christ, the Church, to congregate. To each gathering of believers Jesus has promised to be with them and also to bless them with the gifts needed to serve Him. While the people who serve in the preaching or teaching ministry are the most visible of the workers in the Church, they need hands uplifted in prayer for them, people standing beside them and holding up their hands, and people like *Barnabas* to encourage them.

At this point please take a few minutes to answer a few questions concerning the various *Barnabas's* who are helping you bear the burden of the ministry in your church today:

1. Who in your congregation is the most supportive of your ministry? \_\_\_\_\_  
[write down a few first names Laymen: think of someone in your congregation who is supportive]

2. What very specific things does he/she do to support and encourage you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. In what way especially could you use support? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## I.

I plan to address this topic in three sections. The first section is really directed to the pastors and teachers, and during this section the lay delegates can try to put themselves into our shoes. I will then address the individual members of the congregations and offer some suggestions for their personal support. Finally, I will address the leadership of the congregation with guidelines for formal help from the council, the elders, or a special committee to work with the called workers. Pastors and teachers, did you once sing:

Accept these hands to labor, These hearts to trust and love,  
And deign with them to hasten Thy Kingdom from above?

Then recall that your family also prayed for you:

As lab'ers in Thy vineyard, Lord, send them out to be  
Content to bear the burden Of weary days for Thee  
To ask no other wages When Thou shalt call them home  
Than to have shared the travail Which makes Thy Kingdom come.

You entered the ministry as pastor or teacher knowing that you would have burdens to bear. You knew that you were going out to do battle in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and would need to be armed for spiritual battle as the Apostle Paul urges: "Be strong in the Lord and in His

mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers; against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground:.. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Eph. 6:10 Paul also urged the congregation at Ephesus to use this spiritual power through prayer: "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth words may be given so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains." Eph. 6:19

Paul wrote often about the need for "great endurance as a servant of God, in troubles, hardships, hard work, sleepless nights and hunger." 2 Cor. 6:4 He spoke of his experiences of bearing the heat of the day in the harvest fields: "I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches." 2 Cor. 11:27

Paul found support in his calling from the word he shared with others, the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Paul's ministry was also marked with a struggle against a thorn in his own flesh. "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Cor., 12:8 God shows His power when in spite of our weaknesses and failings, the kingdom continues to grow.

One burden of ministry we must never lay on ourselves is that "if it is to be, it is up to me." You set yourself up for disappointment when you look to yourself for the means, method and source of success. We will all admit that there is encouragement in the "strokes" of sincere Christian friends, but do not set yourself up to expect, nor to think you deserve such strokes. An example of this was the time when a pastor's wife joined the "Secret Pals" of the women's society. She received nothing for her birthday, anniversary nor holiday throughout the year. That hurts. She expected that at least her "Secret Pal" would remember, but instead no one did. And while not expecting such remembrances, you may be pleasantly surprised when they are offered. Rest assured that He who called you into ministry will also supply the strength to accomplish His will.

So at the beginning of this paper, I simply wish to establish two simple facts: first, in the ministry of the Gospel there will be burdens to bear, and secondly, as you faithfully serve your Lord, He will provide the results. You plant the seed. He will produce the fruit. Find your confidence and your joy in that.

## II.

Congregations can help their called workers by sharing a high regard for the divine call. In a 1986 paper, Mission Counselor Marvin Radtke wrote,

"The divinity of the call is of immense value to both the called pastor or teacher as well as the congregation itself. Those called by the Lord for service in His Church will not seek their own honor, but rather the honor of Him who called them. They will persevere in spite of difficulties; they will be strong and courageous, diligent, faithful and careful.

(Also full of care.) They will realize that their sufficiency must and does come from the Lord their God who has called them to specific service in a specific field of His Kingdom.

"The congregation, on the other hand, will diligently hear their pastor, entrust their children to their teacher, and accept their preaching and teaching as God's Word. They will acknowledge that the servants sent to them by the Lord are the very ones whom the Lord wants them to have and hear. They will honor them as the servants of Christ." (p.2, *"Handling a Call"*)

Pastor Radtke also has some counsel for a congregation whose pastor or teacher is deliberating a call.

"A congregation whose pastor (teacher) receives a call faces a brief period of self examination. There are many questions which they must, and ought to face and evaluate. For example: How have they supported their pastor/teacher? Have they fully supported him in his work? Have they supported him fully and as they ought, financially? Have they given full support and encouragement to their families? How can the relationship be improved? Can they, as individuals become more active in the work of the congregation? Can they better support, vocally and actively, the programs of the congregation? Can they give better financial support to these programs? It is only after careful, prayerful and objective evaluation is a congregation able to compare its needs with those of the calling congregation and provide objective and valuable advice for decision making." (p.7 *"Handling a Call"*)

These words fit not only the time that a call is under consideration, but should be asked on a regular basis.

When I began my ministry in "the heart of Dixie," there was a man who was a great help to me in my tender years after graduation, I'll call him "Bernie." Bernie had moved south from a WELS congregation in the heartland in order to work on the Apollo space program. He liked the South. He married a local girl. He joined a local Lutheran church. When WELS finally caught up with the boom town where Werner von Braun lived, Bernie was most excited about helping the young mission get off the ground. He was both concerned that we maintain orthodoxy and continue to reach out to the unchurched. Bernie always spoke his mind. But where he and I might have had a disagreement, he always kept that for a private moment. I still think he worked too hard to get a church building that looks a lot like an International House of Pancakes. But Bernie was open and direct. He spoke words of encouragement as freely as he cautioned about certain pop phrases in my sermons. He appreciated my service and he stood at my side on many occasions to work with me. I hope that every pastor has such a counselor. If you pastors (teachers), don't have one, search through your congregation and find someone you can lean on. Remember that you need more than an encourager who will pump you up from time to time; you need a mentor, an advisor who will be direct and frank when the time is right.

"Bernie" should remind us all of Barnabas, the faithful apostle who labored in the shadow of the Apostle Paul. His name means "encourager." He was just that. "When Paul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas (Joseph) took Paul and brought him to the apostles." Acts

9;27 "The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord." Acts 11:24 "Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch." Acts. 11: 26 Later, "Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them and had not continued with them in the work. They had a sharp disagreement ,and they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus." Acts 15:37 Barnabas was willing to work with a young man who had made a mistake. When called workers make a mistake, may there be willing Christians ready to forgive and help build us back up. "Bernie" did.

What can the congregation do to help their called workers? Let's first look at some things that the individual members can do. Later we will discuss what the congregation can do in an organized way. Once upon a time there was a congregation which was having the problem of divisions (not unlike the church in Corinth) and one faction was dissatisfied with their pastor. This group seemed to have determined that only a change in ministry, would save that congregation. So they began to withhold their offerings; they stopped attending church; they encouraged others to rally to their cause. But the members of the congregation responded to this challenge in a totally unplanned way. The supportive members increased their church attendance and during the time that the divisive faction raised its greatest objections, the regular Sunday church attendance grew. The moral of this story is that every member has something that he or she can do to support their called workers, and that is to faithfully gather for worship, join their pastors and teachers in Bible study and show with their presence that they appreciate their ministries.

The Apostle John also reflects a similar form of encouragement when in his third Epistle he writes to Gaius, "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 2 3. After preaching 52 Sunday sermons in a year a pastor might often wonder what sort of growth has accompanied it. There is no greater joy for such a preacher than to see people living a life worthy of their high calling in Christ Jesus. Likewise, a teacher is thrilled to, have a former student drop by school, speak of those great days when they were in his or her classroom. Just last week a mother told me of a conversation with their warned daughter who graduated from our eighth grade twelve years ago. She had recently told her mother how much she still values her training in a Lutheran elementary school, because when she went on into high school, she saw so many school mates who had no sense of values and no firm moral principles. When the stories come back and show that we have not only taught cognitive skills but also effective skills, we know that the Holy Spirit is working in and through our ministries. Keep those positive stories coming!

Every member can support the called workers by doing just a little more than saying, "Fine sermon," by actually living according to the principles of God's Word under the motivation of the Gospel. Recently someone said to me, "Pastor, you can't change people with sermons." While that is literally true, it is also true that the Holy Spirit can and does work in the hearts of sinners with the law and Gospel preached from the pulpit and taught in the classroom.

Another way in which any family can be supportive is in the area of social activities. Invite your called workers to dinner, especially on those holidays when they are not able to have family with them. Do not allow the Thanksgiving or Christmas holidays to pass without one family or another having them out to their house and that could be together with all the teachers also. Two little things which meant a lot to me stick out in my memory because they came at just the right time. We had gone through a rough meeting, and the next day a little green sheet of paper was on my desk with a neatly written note: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, and not for men." Col. 3:23 Thanks to whomever wrote it. A few days later we received another little thank you note: "Pastor and Marcy: thank you for the ... Given the rate that .... is growing he will be wearing it in no time. We'd also like to express our appreciation for your visits and prayers during the hospital stay. Most of all pastor thank you for a most memorable baptism service. God certainly blessed us when He led us to choose Immanuel as our place of worship." Any individual can assume the simple task of sending cards, notes, little gifts, cookies, cake, fresh bread, or similar tokens of appreciation at anniversaries and birthdays. Remembering the children is also a kindness to the parents.

Now a few words of counsel for the congregation as a whole: Mission Counselor Radtke writes some good advice to the elders and church council. They should examine how have they supported their pastor (teacher)? Have they fully supported him in his work? Have they supported him fully as they ought financially? Have they given full support and encouragement to their families? How can the relationship between pastor (teacher) and congregation be improved? A congregation, and especially the leaders of a congregation ought to be keenly aware of the relationship between pastor and congregation, between teacher and school family. At the time that a call is in hand, these questions become far more urgent.

To assist congregations structure for support of their called workers the Commission on Special Ministries has developed a program which helps to set up a **CARE COMMITTEE FOR CALLED WORKERS**. While such a committee may not be very necessary in a small mission congregation where you have your "Bernie" working with you and encouraging and counseling you, there should be some good ideas coming in the next few pages that can also help the less highly structured mission congregation.

Our district Special Ministries coordinator has encouraged each circuit to have a workshop for the congregations to learn and apply some of these principles. The synodical Commission on Special Ministries has adopted a goal of having 30% of WELS congregations with a C.C.C.W. by the end of 1994 and 40% by the end of 1995. The 1991 convention of WELS resolved to make the C.C.C.W. a permanent program under the Commission on Special Ministries and their handbook was presented to each congregation in January of 1993. Each congregation ought to have this handbook someplace on their shelves or in their files. If not, it is because the pastor decided that he was not eager to have such a committee. I would encourage you laymen to ask your pastor to see a copy when you get home. "The C.C.C.W. program is pro active. It encourages called workers. The contact work is done on the parish level by parish personnel. In no way does this program conflict with the tasks assigned to circuit pastors or school counselors." (from *Preface* to the handbook.)

In its guidelines for a parish care committee for called workers its mission is spelled out as "\_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church supports called workers and their families by encouraging them in their ministry and by enhancing the quality of their lives." Its objective is to "monitor and address each called worker's spiritual, emotional, professional, and physical needs, and also their family's."

The committee shall meet to plan for interviews with called workers; shall meet with each called worker at least once each year to offer encouragement and to review concerns which the worker has and concerns which the committee has; shall conduct interviews with those, workers who enter or leave the ministry of the congregation for some reason other than "cause;" shall periodically receive training which enhances their skills for helping called workers, e.g. listening and encouraging. Resources for training are available from the district C.C.C.W. The committee shall provide the church council with regular reports on its activities as confidentiality allows; shall present its recommendations to the church council twice a year; shall maintain regular contact with the district C.C.C.W. The congregation that has one in place has a ready support group to welcome and assist a newly called worker and also help wrap up loose ends for a worker who has accepted a call and is ready to move on.

The suggested membership for such a committee depends on the size of the congregation. It could consist of from one to six members. Consider appointing women to the committee since they will be working with the wives of called workers or some of the called workers may be women. The church council shall appoint the committee for terms of three years. Each year the committee shall elect a chairman, who shall be a voting member of the congregation, and a secretary. [In smaller congregations, one of the Elders and his wife could serve this function]

Qualifications for the C.C.C.W. are "knows the congregation and its objectives; worships regularly and attends Bible class; understands the proper use of law and Gospel and is able to apply them in counseling called workers; is a good listener; demonstrates a concern for the called workers; empathizes; maintains confidentiality."

It is suggested that an annual or semiannual interview be made with the called workers. Guidelines and suggested approaches are in the handbook also. Essentially the committee is to express their concerns for the worker and his family. It is to be a listening meeting in such a climate that the pastor or teacher can openly discuss their burdens of ministry. The annual interview is set up in this way:

## **THE INTERVIEW**

### **SPIRITUAL CONCERNS:**

1. Are you and your family able to schedule daily Bible study and prayer?
2. Does your ministry among us allow you enough time to pursue your personal spiritual needs and the needs of your family? Is there anything we as a congregation can do to allow you more time for your family and personal spiritual needs?
3. Do you feel that our staff of called workers as a group devotes sufficient time to Bible study and prayer?
4. Does your work among us provide opportunity for the strengthening and expression of your faith? Can we do something to provide better opportunities for both?

The worker might ask the committee:

1. Are the fruits of my personal faith evident in my participation in the activities of the congregation?
2. Do you feel that I am faithfully carrying out my Gospel ministry?
3. Are there any areas of my or my family's conduct that need to be changed?

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

1. How do you assess your relationships within the congregation?
2. How do you assess your relationships with those in the community?

The worker might ask the committee:

1. What is your perception of my relationships with.....?
2. What can I do to improve my relationships?

#### THE MINISTRY (CALLING)

1. How would you evaluate each segment of your work [preaching, teaching, counseling, visitation, administration, etc.]
2. What goals do you have which might improve your ministry among us?
3. What goals do you have for continuing education?
4. What can we do to help you serve better in your calling?
5. Do we in the congregation have a clear understanding of our purpose and goals and how we can work to achieve them?

The worker might ask the committee:

1. How do you evaluate each segment of my ministry?
2. Do you have some suggestions which would help me better carry out my calling here?

#### SUPPORT

1. Are your salary and benefits adequate to meet your needs?
2. Should we be making some improvements in the parsonage?
3. Are you able to schedule sufficient time away from your work for rest and relaxation?
4. Are you able to plan for your retirement?
5. Is our vacation policy adequate?

Where appropriate action is to follow, the committee may recommend specifics to the church council. There may be a need to evaluate the salary or benefits received; emotional or physical problems; and continuing education. While such a formal interview as outlined above may not be necessary, it will form a working outline to get started.

Several years ago Pastor Learman explained the work of the C.C.C.W. to the January delegate conference. Ever since then one of our officers makes a point to catch me in a quiet time or give me a phone call when he gets home from work. He very often asks the very same and sincere question: "How are **you** doing today?" He knows that I am much more likely to keep him up to date with who is in the hospital, or what meetings are scheduled, but he forces me to answer how I feel, what is giving me satisfaction, what burdens can he help me bear. This has been a very supportive thing for me. I thank the Lord that .even after all these years the Lord has raised up in our congregation a "Bernie" to encourage me in my ministry. (Really, I am blessed with many such men and women today)

Oh, may Thy people faithful be  
And in Thy pastors honor Thee  
And with them work and for them pray  
And gladly Thee in them obey,  
Receive the prophet of the Lord  
And gain the prophet's own reward!

So may we when our work is done Together stand before Thy throne  
And joyful hearts and voices raise In one united song of praise,  
With all the bright celestial host, To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. (L.H. 493)

[As time permits we might go back to page one and discuss the three opening questions]