

A SHEPHERD AMONG HIS SHEEP:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A PASTOR AND HIS MEMBERS

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WI

MARCH 24, 2023

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ABSTRACT

Love God's Word. Love God's people. Love connecting God's Word to God's people. Perhaps that would be a good way of summarizing pastoral ministry. Many pastors entered the ministry out of love for God's people. Through their time in the WELS training program, pastors learned about and grew in their love for God's Word. Now it's time to connect the two... but that may be the hardest part and the Bible does not prescribe any one way of doing this. This thesis will seek to prove that pastors can share the gospel best with his members when they build deep personal relationships with them. To do that, this thesis will briefly explain how the apostle Paul built and maintained relationships with people. It will then attempt to describe a few tactics today's pastor can use to build relationships no matter where or whom he serves. Finally, it will describe different ways a pastor can maintain those relationships with his members so he can remain effective in his pursuit of connecting God's Word to God's people.

INTRODUCTION

It's Sunday morning. You wake up and look at the clock—it's 4am. Pondering for a few seconds if you should go back to sleep until your alarm goes off at 5:30, you decide it's no use—you've slept terribly every Saturday and woken up early every Sunday for the past ten years. So, you get out of bed and start your morning routine, going over today's sermon in your head while showering and brushing your teeth. There are still a couple phrases and transitions that need to get ironed out, but you know you'll hit them just right when you're preaching to real people and faces, so you decided to read over the text for Bible study while sipping on your coffee. That's when you remember that the Bible study handouts have yet to be printed—you head to the office.

While driving, you think about your growing list of shut ins whom you failed to visit last week because nothing went according to plan. As you print the handouts, your 5:30 alarm goes off, reminding you how much sleep you missed out on, so you pour yourself another cup of coffee. First service doesn't start till 8:00am, but David comes walking into church at 6:30. He's not an usher, he just comes early to talk to anyone who will give him an ear. Even though it pricks your conscience to do it, you sneak into your office and close the door. The phone rings and without even looking, you answer to tell the elderly woman on the other side of the line how to find the livestream for the third time this month. Before you leave the office, you go over the Old Testament reading once more so you don't flub on any of the names. When you finally go out to greet the incoming members, you're ambushed by three last-minute prayer requests. After

the third you struggle to remember for whom you were supposed to pray since none of the requests were for your members.

In the midst of all the usual Sunday chaos, people are pouring into the church expecting to see their smiling *pastor* with a hand extended to greet them. You smile and welcome them back, saying, “good morning!” more times than you can count. Some are coming in expecting to see their compassionate *counselor* who knows their deepest, darkest secrets and sins. You look at them considerately and smile caringly, remembering that line in your sermon which you think they might particularly appreciate. A few expect to see their *friend*, their go-to call for beverages and basketball games. It’s hard not to spend the whole morning chatting with them about the ending to last night’s game. Still, more people than you’d prefer are just trying to fly under the radar—members whom you suspect could use some personal, pastoral care, but they hold you at 11-pews-and-a-pulpit’s-length and always leave during the closing hymn. Besides all the members you want to greet, there’s a first-time visitor who hasn’t been welcomed yet because the designated greeters are deep in conversation and on your way to greet him yourself, David grabbed you and started telling you about his plans for after church. The visitor was never greeted.

After the Sunday ceremonies are said and done, you get to take that euphoric breath of relaxation and relief... which is followed by a sigh of stress knowing all the things that need to get done and the people you need to see tomorrow joined by a myriad of self-doubting questions: Have I been fulfilling my role as their shepherd, or have I simply become their CEO? Do people see me as anything more than the guy who preaches at them on Sundays? How can I build a better relationship with those who don’t stick around long enough for me to talk to them? Am I spending too much time with some members and not enough with others?

In the pages that follow, you will hear from ministers who have published works on how they created meaningful relationships in their congregations and are now helping pastors around the country do the same. You will hear from Jordan B. Peterson, a secular clinical psychologist and professor emeritus at the University of Toronto. His insights lend themselves to wonderful applications for pastoral ministry. You will also hear from a group of eight WELS pastors who come from a wide range of ministerial backgrounds. These men will, God willing, give wise insights which are drawn from a cauldron of experience.

Within the body of believers, and even more specifically the body of pastors, we can't all be a mouth or an ear or the legs (1 Cor 12:12-31 NIV 2011). We can't all be extraverts or introverts, charismatics or brainiacs. Each pastor will build up the body of believers and build relationships among his members in different ways. What we can all be and have been called to be, however, is shepherds, as Pastor Thomas Kock is fond of saying, "we have to smell like our sheep, men!"¹

How do we do that? How does a pastor build and maintain close friendships with his members while preserving the shepherd/sheep relationship? Before writing any of the words above or below, Pastor Mike Novotny said to me, "You're not going to write the essay that gives guys the perfect solution of what to do. You're going to give them some wisdom on how to approach this honestly; knowing the blessings and the curses of either side and put it in Jesus' hands from there."² It is with that encouragement that we begin with the example of the apostle Paul.

1. Thomas Kock, interview by author. In person, October 18, 2022.

2. Mike Novotny, interview by author. In person, October 25, 2022.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has been conducted on many aspects of leadership and interpersonal relationships. Self-help books make up a large portion of the literature one might find at their local Barnes & Noble. The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library is also filled with many resources on leadership, including our own Pastoral Theology books, books on church leadership, and books by men and women who have made a career out of guiding pastors through their interpersonal relationships. Secular psychologists have contributed to the field of interpersonal relationships as well. There are many pastors with years of experience who have plenty of wisdom to share. Findings from relevant literature and interviews based on these findings are presented below.

PART 1: A CASE STUDY ON THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul built relationships by becoming all things

Sinful as he was, Paul could confidently state that he had “become all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22). He says that he became a slave to everyone, he became a Jew to the Jews, a Gentile to the Gentiles, weak to the weak, strong to the strong, and everything in between (1 Cor 9:19-23). Not only did Paul become all things to all people, but—as all pastors should—he encouraged his fellow pastors to do the same: circumcising Timothy for the sake of reaching the Jews (Acts 16:3) and not circumcising Titus for the sake of the Gentiles and Christian freedom (Gal 2:3). When he was in Thessalonica, he went to the synagogues and taught like a Jewish rabbi, explaining how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to Christ (Acts 17:1-9. He did this on several occasions: Acts 14:1; 17:42; 19:8). When he was in Berea, he became like a professor of students who studied the Scriptures to see if what he said was true (Acts 17:10-15). When in Athens, Paul became an apologist, debating with the philosophers philosophically about their unknown god (Acts 17:16-34). Paul became an exorcist in Philippi to help a slave woman (Acts 16:18). He became the leader of prisoners to save the lives and souls of a prison guard’s whole family (Acts 16:28). His vocation as a tentmaker gave him an in with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2-3). He became a dogmatcian in Ephesus, explaining the difference between John’s baptism of repentance and the baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Acts 19:4-5). He raised a young man from the dead in Troas (Acts 20:10-12) and eventually became a fugitive for preaching the Gospel of Christ (Acts 23:12-35). He even became an advisor to the

skipper of a ship of 276 men (Acts 27:27-38) right before becoming a miraculous healer on Malta (Acts 28:3-6)!³

Aside from reminding you that Paul was a renaissance man before the time of the Renaissance, the reason for regurgitating all the things Paul *became* is to point out to what lengths he went to connect God's Word to God's people. He earned his right to become the shepherd of many people by connecting with them in a variety of different ways. He was not simply an intellect who locked himself in an office reading and writing. He wasn't just an extravert who got a thrill from adventure and being with people. He was a pastor. Even more, it seems as though Paul *wanted to become* a pastor to *people* by doing his best to build relationships with them. This allowed him the opportunity to meaningfully share the gospel of Christ with them. Paul serves as a great example of a man who wholeheartedly understood all three of the basic components of pastoral ministry as defined above: "Love God's Word, love God's people, and connect God's Word to His people."⁴ In becoming all things to all people, Paul earned the opportunity to become the shepherd for a lot of people.

Paul maintained relationships by becoming a shepherd

The relationships Paul gained through these experiences is evident in the fact that he wrote letters in which he thanked God for the people to whom he wrote (Rom 1:8; Col 1:2; Philem 1:4; Phil 1:3; 1 Cor 1:4; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 1:3; 2 Tim 1:3). Beyond simply writing letters to those he was unable to see at the time his pen hit the page, Paul greeted specific individuals (Rom

3. Paul did many things we cannot do as he was an apostle who was appointed by Christ and given the ability to perform miracles.

4. WELS Pastor (A), interview by author. Zoom call, October 20, 2022.

16:1-16) and expressed his desire to see them (1 Thess 2:17; Phil 1:8; Rom 1:11). All of this opened the door for Paul to write some of the most vivid gospel messages—preserved for us to read—to people he truly loved and longed to see.

He was also able to preach vivid law. His relationships went beyond vanity. They went beyond small talk and simple niceties. Paul understood that God’s Word contains both law and gospel and that he had to preach both. He also understood that as a pastor, “he is told not to be provocative or abrasive, but rather *patient*, displaying *meekness* (2 Tm 2:25). Since our Lord Jesus ascribes meekness to himself (Mt 11:29) and still when the situation demanded it could be firm and sharp, it is evident that patience and meekness are not to be confused with weakness or the willingness to yield a principle for the sake of avoiding trouble.”⁵ Paul’s letter to the Galatians begins with, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all” (Gal 1:6, 7). When he wrote to the Corinthian church, he called out a specific member for a specific sin and even told the congregation to hand the one guilty of this sin over to Satan (1 Cor 5:5)! All of this was done in love, trying to draw the Galatians and Corinthians back to Christ; but had Paul not first built and maintained his relationships with these churches, he likely would have only caused offense.

What was Paul’s secret to building and maintaining relationships so well that he could effectively preach both law and gospel? Perhaps that *secret* is found in this passage, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with

5. Armin Schuetze and Irwin Habeck, *The Shepherd under Christ: A Textbook for Pastoral Theology*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1981), 5.

wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor 2:3-5). His secret was a love for Christ, a love for his people, and a desire to share God's Word with his people.

In the study of Pastoral Theology it will be necessary to distinguish between the principles which are set forth in the Word of God, on the one hand, and the manner in which these principles are applied in the contemporary life of our congregations, on the other. The principles are timeless, sacred to all who as true disciples of our Lord want to continue in his Word (Jn 8:31,32). The manner in which these principles are applied, however, may change with the times.⁶

With Paul's example in mind—that he built relationships by becoming all things to all people, maintained those relationships by showing genuine love and care, and that he was unwilling to compromise doctrine for the sake of comfort—we continue by applying these principles to today's pastor with modern literature and examples.

6. Schuetze and Habeck. *The Shepherd under Christ*, xiv-xv.

PART 2: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Old School

When I was at the sem, the old school of thought was: Never get too close to your members, because you may have to bring the hammer of the law down on them; and, it can cause jealousy from others who are saying, ‘Oh, you're cliquey, you only hang out with him.’⁷

There are benefits to keeping your members at a distance so to speak. This allows you, as their pastor, to set boundaries, keeping in both your mind and theirs that “the key thing is your ability to minister to them.”⁸ If your relationship with a member is in any way effecting your ability to shepherd them, it is time to reevaluate that relationship and maybe take a step back. How to do this will be discussed later in this paper. Pastor David Wenzel put it this way, “My first responsibility is this: I am called to serve them as my sheep, as my lambs. I would never want the friendship aspect to get in the way. They can live without my friendship.”⁹ In keeping this distance with your members, you may have an easier time maintaining the shepherd/sheep relationship to which you were called. If that relationship is breached because a close friendship has formed, your members may feel too ashamed or embarrassed to bring their sins to you in fear that it might cause damage to the friendship.

7. David Wenzel, interview by author. Zoom call, November 1, 2022.

8. WELS Pastor (B), interview by author. In person, October 20, 2022.

9. Wenzel interview.

Professor David Scharf, a man who did not shy away from building close relationships with his members in the parish, explains the benefits in keeping a healthy distance with members:

I think the huge benefit is that you're not holding [your title] over them, but you are reminding them - we do have a different relationship than you have with your other friends. I'm still serving as a pastor; your spiritual care is my number one concern. And I think [keeping a healthy distance] does remind them without having to state it explicitly. It reminds them of the high and noble calling that you have in that person's life. They understand we can be really good friends, but I still have another role in your life, not just friend, but a pastor.¹⁰

There are also downsides to keeping your members at a distance. Jard DeVille tells a story about a young pastor, Charles Watson. Charles was once challenged by a couple on something he had said in a sermon; and how did this shepherd respond to his questioning sheep? “He pointed to his clerical collar, just as his old Dutch pastor did when Charles was a youngster. He growled in his most authoritarian manner that *it* was all the justification he needed.”¹¹ This is an extreme case and hopefully one unseen in our churches, but if we as WELS pastors hold the maintenance of our title as *Herr Pastor* over the maintenance of our relationships with our lambs—or even their relationship with Christ—we will likely have the same outcome as Charles, “The young husband stood up, told the pastor how to handle his collar, and led his wife from the office. The following Sunday, Charles looked up from bidding communicants goodbye to see the young couple entering another church across the street. He never did get them back!”¹²

One problem with keeping a distance with your members is that “a lot of lay people look at the pastor as being untouchable, special, more sanctified, holier, better than I am. I know when

10. David Scharf, interview by author. Zoom call, October 20, 2022.

11. Jard DeVille. *The Pastor's Handbook on Interpersonal Relationships: Keys to Successful Leadership*. (Atlanta: J.A. Thomas & Associates, 1995), 24.

12. DeVille, *The Pastor's Handbook on Interpersonal Relationships*, 24-25.

I was growing up, when I looked at my pastor, I truly felt that because he was a pastor, he didn't have any problems. He didn't deal with any issues.”¹³ This problem is not essential to distant relationships between a pastor and his members; but it can get rather slippery when going down this slope and could even give the impression that you are just a cookie-cutter employee of the church, a hired hand, and uninterested in smelling like your sheep.

Pastor David Wenzel explains another issue with keeping distance with members,

As a pastor, if you're not personable then you can't relate to them. You may not care if your doctor has an awful bedside manner because you can respect his expertise. You just gnash your teeth as you walk out to your car in the parking lot. ... The difference for me as a pastor is if I'm just viewed as somebody with a lousy bedside manner, that's going to really hurt my ministry. ... There was a day when the pastor was the most educated man in the congregation. ... and because of that, I think there was a natural, built in, “I respect Herr Pastor because, well, he knows so much more than me.” I still may know more about Greek, or biblical archaeology or the doctrine of predestination than somebody in my congregation, but he knows a whole lot more about some things than I will ever. So, I think you have to earn your respect within your field. And not just because I wear a shirt and tie and they see me in a suit on Sunday.¹⁴

Kennon Callahan, a pastor and consultant to pastors around America, explains the transition from the old school of thought to the new:

The day of the professional minister is over. ... The day of the missionary pastor has come. Prior to World War II, doctors thought of themselves as doctors, lawyers thought of themselves as lawyers, and ministers thought of themselves as ministers. Following World War II, doctors began to think of themselves as professionals, lawyers began to think of themselves as professionals, and ministers began to think of themselves as professionals. The focus shifted from vocation to profession, from calling to professionalism. ... The “professional minister movement” was a reflection, in religious circles, of the cultural movement toward professionalism in the wider society of that time.¹⁵

13. Paul Cerny, interview by author. In person, October 19, 2022.

14. Wenzel interview.

15. DeVille, *The Pastor's Handbook on Interpersonal Relationships*, 4.

Jard Deville argues that the *old school of thought* served well in its time; and, while the *professional pastor* provided stability for members coming out of an unstable time, it may be time to move on in this new age.

For many, the professionalization of the ministry was considered to be a useful corrective over against an earlier time when some felt that all that was needed to be minister was a dose of sincerity, a dash of commitment, a little bit of good will, and a calling from God. The professional minister movement came along and decreed that a person needed training, education, professional qualifications, and even continuing education in order to be a professional minister.¹⁶

None of these so-called qualifications are bad or wrong, but there is a lot more to shepherding a flock than having a master's degree in divinity. Today, people don't expect to see a clerical collar, in fact, it may even turn them off. People want someone to lead them who is as charismatic, or at least as caring, as they are knowledgeable. "The problem is that there are very few persons in this life's pilgrimage who can survive the pressures of being the charismatic leader without incurring some major misstep along the way. It is hard to find a charismatic inspirer who can sustain the expectations of the covenant community for very long."¹⁷ With the #MeToo movement and the tainted history of the clergy, keeping a distance may be the safest route to take. But are we called to take the safest and easiest route?

Why build relationships?

Although it may not be the safest route, the wisdom gathered from pastors whom I interviewed suggests that the best route for a pastor is to build close, personal relationships with his members

16. DeVille, *The Pastor's Handbook on Interpersonal Relationships*, 6.

17. Kennon Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 57-58.

- to smell like his sheep. As many benefits as there might be in keeping a distance from your members, there seems to be many more in having close relationships with them. “You establish trust. There’s an old saying that goes, ‘people don’t care about how much you know until they know how much you care.’”¹⁸ This is especially true in pastoral ministry. If we are called to be Christ’s ambassadors here on earth, we should reflect the love Christ has for his Church, the members of his flock, those whom he has entrusted into our care. The benefits for God’s Kingdom are life-changing, “whoever shows the love gets the soul. ... The value is when you invest in them, they listen. ... When they know that you love them, you can have pretty much any conversation with them, pro or con, because they know that you are always going to operate from a heart of love and in their best interests.”¹⁹ When we, ambassadors of Christ and shepherds of his flock, can show people that we genuinely love and care about them, it will be easier for them to see that Christ does too. “If you have a close personal relationship with a member, you’re going to be able to serve them better,”²⁰ and in turn, be more effective in preaching law and gospel.

There are also many benefits in these relationships for the pastor.

I think the benefits are that we are relational creatures, and we need that. It helps mental health. I think it helps spiritual health. It helps us function in life because—in the vast majority of cases—we’re going to be uprooted from our support system; we’re not going to be with our classmates anymore. We might have some [classmates] nearby but that’s different than seeing them every day. We’re going to be separated from family and friends that we grew up with. We’re going to be in a completely different area; and so, we’re kind of starting over with our support systems.²¹

18. Cerny interview.

19. WELS pastor (A) interview.

20. Scharf interview.

21. WELS Pastor (B) interview.

Relationships with members are invaluable in preventing pastor burnout. Everyone has “the need for people, and pastors are no different. Otherwise, you'll feel like you're on an island. Just as far as contentment in life, that's a big benefit.”²² Instead of feeling like you're on an island, when you can have relationships within your congregation, you get to “go through life together with other Christians for the sake of mutual encouragement and sharpening, and the pastor is part of that just by being a Christian.”²³ Many pastors do get uprooted from their families and support systems. In the outlying districts, some pastors must travel over an hour to the next WELS church to find another WELS pastor. In those instances, it seems that finding friends among your congregation would be a necessity.

Is it ok to be friends with members?

Just because there are benefits to doing something does not make it good or even ok. If we are going to argue that the “old school”²⁴ of thought is outdated and a new school of thought needs to be implemented, we do need to ask if having friends among our members is acceptable.

The Apostle Paul seemed to think so. He may not have used the word “friend,” but he addressed specific members of the congregations in his letters with even more intimate titles as noted above. Even if Paul did not use the word “friend,” Jesus did (Jn 15:13-15). Jesus didn't shy away from using this term or from giving the impression that he had close friends among his disciples and spending more time with them than he did with others. “Jesus did not feel it

22. Scharf interview.

23. Jeremy Mattek, interview by author. Zoom call, November 1, 2022.

24. Wenzel interview.

inappropriate for him as a religious leader to pull up beside *one* especially close, personal friend within his ‘congregation.’ ... If Jesus needed to employ such natural yet varied levels of relationships, surely youth ministers—and elders and deacons and worship leaders and other church leaders—need to do the same thing.”²⁵

Here’s a practical question: Where else can a pastor find friends? The typical places for anyone to find friends would be work, church—which is the same as work for a pastor—or society, and if you serve a mid-sized congregation in a small town, where can you go that you won’t run into one of your members? So, if a pastor is to maintain a healthy social life and obtain the essential human need for friendship, where can he go? His congregation. “First and foremost, I’m a fellow member of the congregation. There’s a reason why our pastors, if they go to another church, they transfer their membership.”²⁶

How to build relationships

One of the last things we want to do is give the congregation the impression that their spiritual leaders are “functioning more as a board of directors than as hands-on shepherds, mentors, and equippers who smell like sheep ... caught up in marathon meetings, setting policy, administrating, wrangling over budgets, and caring for facilities.”²⁷ As a senior at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary with zero years of pastoral experience under my belt, I understand this is easier said than done. Most pastors chuckle at a naïve seminarian who believes his only duties in

25. Lynn Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*. (West Monroe: Howard, 1997), 94.

26. Cerny interview.

27. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 96-97.

the ministry will be to preach, teach, and make use of the sacraments. But think back for a moment to your seminary days before you got into the parish and took on more responsibilities than were in your call packet. What did the ideal assignment look like then? What does your ideal ministry look like now? Do the words of Acts 6:2 ring in your ears every once-in-a-while, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables”? Just because a ministry that consists solely of the ministry of the Word of God sounds idealized, that doesn’t mean it is not biblical or attainable. If we can keep this ideal, biblical ministry in mind, building relationships with our members may come much more naturally.

“Bloom where you’re planted”²⁸

If he loves the place where he grew up, it may be very easy for a pastor to bloom where he’s planted if he is assigned or called to his home state. He knows the culture, he knows the people, and he likely knows how to connect God’s Word to the people there because he knows how to connect with them on a personal level. However, if a pastor is called to Minnesota or the West Coast, wearing a slice of cheese on his head and yelling “Go Pack GO!” during the Sunday morning announcements is a sure way to label himself an outcast. One Wisconsin native put it this way, “I finally figured out that to the [Cornhuskers], I need to become a [Cornhusker]. And if I wasn't going to do that, I was going to have 0% chance of reaching any of these people because they viewed me like I was a cheese-head or an outsider.”²⁹ A little friendly competition with your members may be fun—and if done correctly, could actually serve to enhance your

28. WELS pastor (A) interview.

29. WELS pastor (A) interview. Edits made for anonymity.

relationships with your members—but wearing a Pittsburgh Steelers tie in Baltimore is *also* a great way to signal to your sheep that Sundays *after* church, you’re on the *other* team.

The Midwest culture is one in which attending a child’s confirmation party at which no beer is offered could be considered offensive. Pastor Thomas Kock, who served several years in Tennessee, said, “in the south alcohol is looked at differently than it is in the north. ... There was a number of times when I was on evangelism calls that people would offer me an alcoholic drink, a beer or glass of wine or something like that. And some of them later told me that they were testing me. ... They were wondering if I would treat them like the Baptist preachers would.”³⁰ This does not mean you can never have an alcoholic beverage again if you are called beyond the boarder of the WELS homeland, but maybe it would be best to get a feel for the atmosphere before cracking a cold one around your members.

You don’t need to desecrate your integrity by forsaking your favorite football team or take a Nazarite vow whenever you find yourself in a new state; and this doesn’t only apply to football and alcohol consumption. Get involved and immersed in the lives and the culture of the people you’ve been called to serve. Start conversations with your people to meet them where they are. If your church has a school, be there to greet the kids and parents as they come in and go to the sporting events. “If you have kids, that’s where everything happens.”³¹ Buy a hunting license, get into cars, learn to knit if you that’s what they’re into. Do whatever you can to smell like your sheep and bloom where you’re panted.

30. Kock interview.

31. Cerny interview.

Every-member visits

A pastor needs to get out of his office – that’s where his members are – he needs to see people. One Seminary professor has often made this point: “Anytime I was feeling down—and you’re going to have those times in the ministry—I would just push myself and get out and make a call or a visit and I’d always come back energized.”³²

Making sure that *we* are kept healthy through relationships by getting out of the office will make us much better suited to shepherd those whom we have been called to serve with the law and the gospel. The pastors interviewed for this paper suggest that this will also lead to healthier members and healthier congregations who are better connected to the Word of God – “A house going pastor makes a church going people.”³³

There can be a sense of distance and strangeness over against the pastor if his people know him only from seeing him in the pulpit. If, however, he has contacted them in their homes and they have learned to know him as a friend who takes a personal interest in them, it will be much easier for them to accept his ministration in a time of trial, or to go to him for help when a problem arises in their personal life, or when they are looking for an answer to questions which they have concerning matters of doctrine and practice.³⁴

As you can see from the source of the quote above, building close relationships with members is not a new concept. It has been known for a long time that a pastor needs to tend to his sheep beyond the walls of the church. He needs to smell like they do so they recognize him and welcome him as their shepherd. “How do you get sheep smell on you when you don’t touch them—except for a hand-shake and some quick words in the aisle Sunday morning?”³⁵

32. WELS pastor (B) interview.

33. WELS pastor (B) interview.

34. Schuetze and Habeck. *The Shepherd under Christ*, 141.

35. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 40.

One of the most obvious times a pastor needs to focus on building relationships with his members—and the time my classmates and I are thinking of right now—is coming to a new church. For a veteran pastor who accepted a call to a new congregation, this is an opportunity for a fresh start and a time to set the tone for what ministry will be like in this new place. For a graduate, it's just scary. Regardless of if your status is veteran or graduate, every-member visits should be at the top of your mind. For a pastor going into a church with 100 members, this should be—conceptually—no problem; if you visit two members every week, you will know everyone before the year is done. But what if you are going to a church that has well over 1,000 members like Immanuel Lutheran Church in Greenville, WI did when Professor David Scharf was called to go there?

When I got to Emanuel, I wanted to do every-member visits. My associates said, “Oh, that's a bad idea. It's just too many people.” It was the best idea ever. And, I would say, that just spending that hour/hour and fifteen minutes in their living room ... it was like popping the cork off the bottle or something. It got everything flowing. I developed good relationships with people through those visits and ... boy, those relationships grew pretty close pretty quickly.³⁶

Not only did these visits *pop the cork off the bottle* and get everything flowing at the beginning of his time there, but Professor Scharf also explained the ongoing effects this visit had when approaching a family mourning the loss of a loved one,

Eleven years later, after doing that home visit with them and being in their living room for an hour, they've got tears in their eyes. And they're talking about how close we were and how we always connected so well. And I'm going – I really haven't talked to you in eleven years. But again, building that connection right off the bat with getting into their house, suddenly, in their mind, you were connected.³⁷

36. Scharf interview.

37. Scharf interview.

Prioritizing every-member visits from the start allowed Professor Scharf to continue this habit even as the church grew to well over 2,000 members.

I always made it a point to get into everybody's house there. Sometimes multiple times, depending on if it's a transfer, okay, just one stop. If it's a prospect that's going to take a lot more nurture. I really do think whether you're in a congregation of 2,000, or 200, or 20, trying to do the every-member visit—at least with the willing—will pay dividends for years and years in your ministry, and you're going to get to a higher level of trust quicker than you otherwise would have.³⁸

But what if you are Pastor Jeremy Mattek who was called to Immanuel Lutheran Church in Greenville, WI when the church was closing in on 3,000 members? He said, “the goal was definitely not to make home visits with every member of Immanuel Greenville. It just wasn't going happen. And realistically it was going to be a number of years before I would even meet every member of the church.”³⁹ Another WELS pastor shared a story in which he attended a district convention and ran into a seminary classmate,

[The district was] making a big push to visit your people, visit your people, visit your people – every member – a visit from the pastor. And I thought that this was fine because I did this not once a year, I did it like four times a year because I didn't have that many people. And then we divided up by families. And [my classmate] just turned to me and said, “Do you know how impossible that is?” Well, he's got six or seven hundred households. He's just one guy. You just do the math and divvy it up.⁴⁰

Before you start looking up at the ceiling counting with your fingers – if you say the average family had three people, that's between 1,800—2,100 members in 600—700 houses. If the pastor visited three houses a week, it would take him three to four years to get into everyone's home.⁴¹

38. Scharf interview.

39. Mattek interview.

40. WELS pastor (A) interview.

41. Three visits a week is—admittedly—a conservative number. Some may find it possible to be more aggressive and do upwards of five to ten visits a week. For the body of the paper, I chose three as the arbitrary

The good news is that every-member visits are not the only way to get in touch with every member. Pastor Mattek said, “I still was able to connect with every member of the church even in my first year. I got a list of their birthdays ... so I would call people on their birthday. It was a touch point. ... And it was a way for me to at least be on their mind and for me to *make sure* that I *was* going to be on their mind. And they saw me as their pastor, and as somebody who *wanted* to be their pastor.”⁴² Calling people on their birthdays is one of many ways to start building relationships with your members. It has nothing to do with church per se. It has everything to do with showing love and care, building a relationship through which you will be able to better share the law and the gospel with them.

“Don’t be weird”⁴³

It’s one thing to get out of your office and be with your members; it’s another thing to make those visits effective for your goal of *building relationships*. To make those visits effective – don’t be weird. One of the benefits to getting into your members’ houses is that they get to see you in action outside of the church. They get to see their pastor without a suit and tie,⁴⁴ holding a beer, petting their dogs and talking with their kids. If he is able to bring his family on the visit, they get to see him be a husband and a father, a guest in someone else’s home. They get to learn

number assuming the pastor is being faithful in sermon and bible preparation and is not neglecting the shut ins or his own family. Even if he did, however, manage to do ten visits every week, it would still take the better part of two years to meet everyone.

42. Mattek interview.

43. Scharf interview; Novotny interview; WELS pastor (A) interview.

44. This is not to say that member visits cannot be done in a suit and tie. There are many ways to approach these visits. Each pastor will have to decide which tactics he will employ depending on his situation.

from their pastor off-script, out of the pulpit and in their territory. “How will Christians be equipped for ministry today? Likely, not very well if they only see their spiritual leaders in a controlled environment at church, when everyone is dressed up, talking religion, and on their best behavior. We’ve got to get out into ‘their world.’”⁴⁵

Say you have been invited to a member’s house to watch a football game and other friends of the member will be in attendance. If you show up wearing a clerical collar or, the more modern equivalent, introducing yourself to all your member’s non-member friends as “Pastor so-and-so,” you may have just guaranteed that everyone in the room will feel less comfortable letting their hair down and relaxing. Or, on the positive side, you may have opened the door to people inevitably approaching you with religious questions all night. Not a bad thing, but now you likely won’t be able to truly see how your member lives at home away from church and with his guard down around his friends.⁴⁶

This may be an issue that faces those who are just starting more than those who have walked around the block a few times. Young men who have just graduated from an eight-year training program are likely very excited to go and announce to everyone that “I am Pastor _____” while commenting on the etymology of every word they hear with a Latin or Greek root coming from another person’s mouth. However, doctors understand there is a time for a scalpel and a time for a stitching needle, pastors also understand that there is a time for the law and a time for the gospel. Perhaps we should also know that there is a time for a title and a time for a first name.

45. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 109-10.

46. These reactions will all depend on everyone’s background with religion and pastors. In any case, maybe the best route is to let people get to know you as a person or even a *friend* before they get to know you as a *pastor*.

A WELS pastor once told me a story in which he asked a member to pick him up from the airport after a trip. He asked this specific member because he had not been to church in some time and wanted to make contact with him again—a great strategy! However, as they were driving in the car, some rain subsided and a rainbow appeared, the pastor took the opportunity after a moment of silence to point up and say, “Look, the sign of the covenant.” He had effectively slaughtered the conversation for the rest of the ride and today admits that was maybe the last thing he should have said in that moment.⁴⁷

Jordan Peterson addressed this issue in an interview.

You can't think, “Well I'm going to ask questions to lead this person in a particular direction.” ... I get this from Christian traditionalists fairly frequently. They get up and they ask me about my religious convictions but really what they want to do is corner me into admitting that I should accept Jesus Christ as my Savior and join a particular denomination. That's not a question. It's just a manipulation. And so ... like your statements, your questions should be honest, and if you ask people questions and you really listen, they will untangle themselves.⁴⁸

As Christians, we see the Great Commission as our job description. It should be first and foremost in our minds at all times. True. However, making disciples does not mean tossing a Bible reference into the air at random or by force and hoping the Holy Spirit will swoop down and slam it in for a soul-saving alley-oop. The better approach would be that when you have encounters with your members—or really with anyone—think, “this is my opportunity just to be a real human to you right now and show you that not every Christian is weird. Not that I've got to find some Jesus judo move.”⁴⁹

47. Another WELS pastor experienced a similar situation in which this tactic worked very well and opened the door for a great conversation. Each pastor will need to read the *person* to decide how to approach the situation.

48. Jordan Peterson “Jordan Peterson: How to Become the Person You've Always Wanted to Be | E113.” January 2, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uLDin9A9pc>.

49. Novotny interview.

This does not mean we should avoid religious conversations. Pastor Jeremy Mattek rightly said, “I have a hard time being in a conversation with someone and not looking for opportunities to be pastoral.”⁵⁰ We should be pastoral in everything we do – after all, being a pastor is not simply a job or a title, it is a calling; but it is a calling to show genuine love and genuine care to people. In showing that, as Peterson says above, people will untangle themselves for you and possibly open the door for religious conversations. “Sometimes we have opportunities and—you don't want to miss them—doors really open for emotional spiritual conversations. But you have to play the long game with evangelism.”⁵¹

Connect with people in whatever way you can genuinely connect with them. If it's over football, talk about stats. If it's the ballet, talk about Misty Copeland. If it's video games, talk about the latest Call of Duty. Whatever it is, show genuine care for the other person and don't be ashamed to engage in their interests.

When you treat people like human beings and just ask, “what's going on?” or, “what are you working on today?” That sort of stuff goes a long way just to get people to open up. Nobody ever takes an interest. But when you take an interest in people and ask, “how's your family,” it's going to be so disarming because nobody asks it. You'll find that, more often than not, they will open up to you. The second time you see him, you just follow up on whatever splinters he gave the last time. And you don't necessarily even need to run in there with, “Oh, that's terrible,” and, “I'll pray for that.” I mean, if it necessitates it, go right ahead. But the fact that you're showing care and compassion for them as human beings will invariably open up the door.⁵²

Being weird is not the same as being quirky. People—for the most part—enjoy quirkiness, it's endearing. A problem pastors may run into is putting on a mask, trying to be someone or something they are not or taking themselves too seriously. “I believe leaders can take

50. Mattek interview.

51. Novotny interview.

52. WELS pastor (A) interview.

themselves too seriously. And if we aren't careful, we can force everyone else to take us too seriously."⁵³ The danger here is if people take you too seriously, you are doomed to having only serious conversations, and serious doesn't always equal genuine. On the flip side, if a pastor is trying to be charismatic or goofy but is neither of those things, people will have a hard time having serious conversations with him. "Some people have a natural charisma and an ease about them where people will warm up to them pretty quickly. There are other people who have a commanding presence. There are other people who are just a little bit eccentric or awkward, and it probably is going to take them a little bit longer."⁵⁴

Regardless of where a pastor finds himself in these categories – charismatic, commanding, eccentric – he needs to embrace it. We should never stop trying to improve in the areas that need improving, but Pastor David Wenzel says to do it

within reason, be yourself. Don't have two personas. ... There are some young guys I've heard who ... it's like they have a voice they use when they're conversing, they have a voice they use in Bible class, and then they get in the pulpit and I wonder, 'who in the world is that?' Try to avoid that. Because I think members can struggle with that. So, he puts that robe on and who does he turn into? It should be the same guy.⁵⁵

Be who you are, "who you are is a child of God, what you do is pastor."⁵⁶ Don't wear a mask, "people can smell a phony a mile away. I think a trap that I can fall into is that you want to be liked."⁵⁷ Don't pigeonhole yourself into categories like *introvert* and *extrovert* but be willing to strengthen your personality weaknesses.

53. Kevin Harney, *Leadership from the inside out: Examining the Inner Life of a Healthy Church Leader*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 141.

54. WELS pastor (A) interview.

55. Wenzel interview.

56. Kock interview.

57. Cerny interview.

If you're hyper-extroverted, you should probably learn to shut up at parties now and then, and listen just to see what's going on, to see if you can manage it, you know? And if you're introverted, well, then you should learn how to speak in public, and to learn how to go to parties without hiding in the corner and saying nothing to anyone ... and if you're agreeable, then you need to learn how to be disagreeable so people can't push you around. And if you're disagreeable, you need to learn how to be agreeable.⁵⁸

Don't pull Jesus judo moves⁵⁹ on people. "Look at the people who actually come to church or join a BIC class. They're not the people who got tricked into a law/gospel presentation. They're the people who probably had ears to hear because you were a normal human and loved them."⁶⁰

⁶¹ After all this, "if you're looking at me and you're thinking to yourself, 'Meh, he's nothing special.' Well then, mission accomplished! Because who cares about me or about you or about any faithful Christian who is carrying out the work of the church – which is to point people away from ourselves and point people to Christ Jesus."⁶²

Cautions

Up to this point, we have almost exclusively discussed the benefits to building close relationships with your members and how to do that. While my interviews with WELS pastors seemed to indicate that the benefits far outweigh the negatives, the interviewees did share some words of caution.

58. viralrescue. "Jordan Peterson: Why Do Nice Guys Nice Finish Last? (Must Watch)." March 26, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di2FM8WZI5E>.

59. Novotny interview.

60. Novotny interview.

61. This is true for interactions the pastor has as well as laypeople. Make sure to train your members in this way as well.

62. Neuberger, Joseph. "Daily Chapel - December 5, 2022." Livestream. Accessed December 6, 2022.

“They’re not your counselor.”⁶³

The fact that pastors can, at times, feel as though they are on an island is not only due to a lack of friendships among their members, “the nature of public ministry is such that ... nobody gets it. Just nobody. Unless they’re also a pastor.”⁶⁴ In some ways, this is no different from any other job.

If you stood in a room full of surgeons listening to them talk about their individual experiences and stories, you would likely be forced to sip on your drink while politely nodding your head in ignorant agreement, occasionally letting out a puff of air from your nose when everyone else laughs to avoid looking like an idiot. In the same way, if a layman found himself in a room full of pastors who were talking about the good ‘ol days studying hermeneutics and reciting the שמע, who then broke out into a four-part *Sie Leben Hoch*, that member would likely be forced to snort out some uncomfortable sympathy laughs as well.

The fact that no one gets it, however, goes a little deeper than that.

I think the reason why it's always challenging for pastors to have friends is because you're carrying the weight of the world and everybody else's burdens. You just can't talk about it. You just can't. I mean, you're even bound by law in a lot of cases that you can't even share it, not even with your wife. People don't get the pressure that pastors are under. Additionally, so many times, what makes it difficult or complicated to have real relationships is that you are the standard bearer, you are the shepherd, you're the pastor, you're the guy in the pulpit. There's such a level of respect for that office. ... Even in social settings, you're always on.⁶⁵

In this way, a pastor will never get as close to a member as he will his fellow brothers in the ministry. This is in no way meant to diminish the purpose of this paper or to discourage you

63. Scharf interview.

64. WELS pastor (A) interview.

65. WELS pastor (A) interview.

from getting close to your members. Just be aware that there are limitations. You cannot expect a member to be your counselor, confidant, or circuit pastor. For this reason, “you can't replace the brotherhood, and you should cherish the brotherhood. And that's why attendance at conferences and the Mentor Program and having some sort of a trusted friend [in the field is so important.] ... That's why on balance, you have to walk a real fine line, because you are God's representative period.”⁶⁶ A church will be stronger if the pastor builds close relationships with his members. Just remember, they're not your counselor.

“Let them ask for the dance”⁶⁷

There is a such thing as getting too close – especially when it comes to members of the opposite sex. Since this paper is written primarily for pastors, we're talking about women.

Is it okay to give women a hug? And if so, which women? The old grandmas - everybody's okay with that. The 25-year-old single woman that's attractive? Is it okay to give that person a hug? Is it okay to put your arm around them? Shake their hand? Is it okay to meet them for lunch? For coffee? In a public place? In a private place? Is it okay to meet with her privately for counseling?⁶⁸

This list of questions which run through a pastor's mind when dealing with women could be much longer. My earlier reference to the #MeToo movement stating that we shouldn't always take the safe route made the point that we should be bold in building relationships with our members. This does not give us a free pass to negligence.

66. WELS pastor (A) interview.

67. Scharf interview.

68. Mattek interview.

The biblical principle when it comes to relationships with women is that “there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity ... because these are improper for God’s holy people” (Eph 5:3). Not only are they improper, but they could cost a pastor his career and his ministry. Even if he is innocent doesn’t mean he did nothing wrong. Placing himself in a position in which he could give the hint that he committed sexual immorality or an impure act is enough to violate this principle.

It is wise and commonly recommended to make sure you are never alone with a woman in a private setting. Leave your office door open and make sure someone else is in the building. Go to a public place. Bring someone with you if you must go to her house. These are all good practices which are likely common sense at this point which serve to protect you and your ministry.

At the same time, we don’t need to be afraid of women. We don’t want to come across as stand-offish. We also don’t want to come across as prejudiced or misogynistic, giving bro-hugs and handshakes to our male members then swiftly tucking our hands in our pockets when a female approaches. “Are there situations where it’s okay to hug a female member? Yeah. It’s when she comes in and hugs you.”⁶⁹ Notice who is the one approaching – she is. While it may seem appealing and friendly to be the guy who gives everyone a hug, when you’re in the process of building relationships, “always let them take that first step.”⁷⁰

There is also the possibility of becoming too close to male and female members in a non-physical way. What do you do if a member sees you as nothing more than their buddy who gives an hour-long presentation on Sundays where your words in the pulpit mean as much as they do

69. Scharf interview.

70. Scharf interview.

when watching a football game? What if you hear the mumblings of other members suggesting you may be showing favoritism in the way you vote in church voters' meetings and carry out church discipline?

If it ever gets to the point where your personal relationship or personal friendship with somebody is such that they no longer will listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd or there's not a professionalism and an authority when the time needs to be professional and have an authority, then you know that it's gone too far.⁷¹

There are two main approaches to this issue.

- 1) If I do like you as a friend, but you're choosing friend at the expense of pastor and authority, that's when I directly address it. ... I think you've got to have the courage to call it out. Call it what it is before it festers and grows. You're like, "Man, I love hanging out with you, too. But in this church, God's Word gets the final word and I'm called to preach it with authority. Can you submit to that?" And I just put it out there and open up my Bible to Hebrews 13 and say, "that's what this is around here. And it will compromise my integrity and my ministry and my faith to do anything less."⁷²

It needs to be addressed with the person pretty quickly.⁷³

- 2) I think the answer is some space, some distance, withdraw, is probably the best advice. You don't even need to say anything.⁷⁴

These two approaches are in no way pitted against each other. Pastors needs to know when either is appropriate. One pastor responded to this question by giving both answers,

Well, I suppose you'd have two options, just kind of pull back – let the rubber band contract a little bit without really saying much, or you say something. I would think maybe just letting the rubber band contract a little bit might be the better way than addressing it head on, because you don't know if they're seeing it that way.⁷⁵

71. WELS pastor (A) interview.

72. Novotny interview.

73. Mattek interview.

74. WELS pastor (A) interview.

75. WELS pastor (B) interview.

In other words, if you are certain the other person is seeing your relationship as a friendship over above a shepherd/sheep relationship, address it. If you're unsure, it might be better to just lay low for a little while. Regardless of the approach you decide to take, some form of action needs to be made to ensure that the dignity and respect of the pastoral office and the Word of God is maintained.

It seems that building close relationships with your members will lead to a healthier congregation and a richer atmosphere for preaching the gospel. As pastors, we are called to love and serve Christ's Church the way he would. Because of human sinfulness and limitations, we do need to be cautious when entering these relationships.

I would say, a little like our relationship with God—how you can know God truly without knowing Him fully—I think that your members can know you truly without knowing you fully. ... That's still a genuine friendship outlet for the pastor. ... I still genuinely had just a ball with my members, and that basic human need for friendship was satisfied.⁷⁶

76. Scharf interview.

PART 3: MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

You have built close relationships with your members by blooming where you've been planted, visiting your members in their homes, and doing everything in your power to avoid being weird while keeping a few words of caution in mind. The people have accepted you as their shepherd because you've earned the right to be called their pastor. The rest should be easy - "because you've built that trust, it's almost like pushing something down a hill, that momentum continues."⁷⁷ However, you now have between 100—3,000 members to care for. How in the world will you maintain relationships with that many people?

Learn from Jesus' Example

Good equippers do it like Jesus did it: recruit twelve, graduate eleven, and focus on three.⁷⁸

There is something to be said about organizing your relationships with your members like this.

Otherwise, there would be no way one man could effectively maintain 100—3,000 relationships.

Lynn Anderson goes on to point out how

Jesus' ministry touched people on several different levels of relational intimacy. At the first level, Jesus fed and preached to *thousands*. ... Second, Jesus worked with *hundreds*. ... The third circle of Jesus' relationships narrowed sharply as he sent out only *seventy-two* for a special mission. ... But equipping moved front and center in Jesus' ministry at the fourth level, when Jesus zeroed in on only *twelve* men. ... On the fifth level, *Jesus*

77. Scharf interview.

78. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 88.

*had a few especially close friends. ... Now, sixth and finally, let us follow Jesus one level deeper into his relationships to “one ... disciple whom Jesus loved...”*⁷⁹

The fact is that “psychologists seem to indicate that they don't think you can have a close relationship with more than about 120 people.”⁸⁰ In real life, however, how many people do you communicate with daily whom you would call *close friends*? Speaking of people with whom you communicate daily, one WELS pastor said, “The reality is, you can't really have more than two or three close friends. You don't have time for that.”⁸¹ To the Anderson quote above, some pastors might respond, “Amen!”⁸² because that’s how their ministries happened to pan out – “that’s just the way it kind of naturally happened. That pretty much—at least at this point in time—sums up where I am.”⁸³

The numbers might not be identical, but David Scharf said about his time at Immanuel, Greenville, “there were probably 15-ish people that I was pretty close with.... I don't know about friends with one. ... it helps with the whole favoritism thing. ... Then you’re not seen as just, ‘oh, well, that's his favorite person.’ ... it’s probably safer to have a bigger group than [one].”⁸⁴

One thing to remember when considering a philosophy like the one quoted above is that “Jesus is Jesus.”⁸⁵ Although “Jesus did not feel it inappropriate for him as a religious leader to

79. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 90-94. Emphases original.

80. Kock interview.

81. WELS pastor (B) interview.

82. Novotny interview.

83. Cerny interview.

84. Scharf interview.

85. Scharf interview.

pull up beside *one* especially close, personal friend within his ‘congregation,’”⁸⁶ *he* was able to do this without even giving a *hint* of showing favoritism.

Another thing to keep in mind is that this “would probably fall under descriptive, not prescriptive. We don't have a pastoral theology book of the Bible that says, ‘do it this way.’”⁸⁷ “I think we have to stop short of saying, ‘the way Jesus did it is the way that we have to do it.’”⁸⁸ As sinful men, we can learn from what Jesus did and how he managed his relationships. The issue most pastors seemed to have with this philosophy was with having one especially close friend within the congregation because it would be very challenging to avoid showing favoritism and getting too relaxed around that one member. Pastor David Wenzel said, “No matter who I'm with, I need to behave as God wants me to behave. The danger comes when you get too close to somebody, and you relax a little bit. Sometimes Satan gets the best of us when we're relaxed.”⁸⁹

A warning I received from Pastor Paul Cerny at Immanuel, Campbellsport is that “when you get to a church as a pastor, the one or two people who want to be your best friend right out of the gate are the one or two people you need to watch out for”⁹⁰ because they may try to use your friendship to their own advantage within the church. At the same time, when you have had time to get a feel for the people of your church and looking at how Jesus conducted his

86. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 94.

87. Wenzel interview.

88. Mattek interview.

89. Wenzel interview.

90. Cerny interview.

relationships, we recognize that he at times was “vulnerable as a friend and recognized that there was a lot of strength to be gained for a person who has friends who are there for him.”⁹¹

On a very important and practical level, Pastor Mike Novotny said that “there's a difference between fellowship and friendship. I have fellowship with every member of my church, but I don't have friendship [with every member]. I can't. If I just took my free time divided by the number of members—and I can't pick favorites—if I'm going to have dinner with one person, I have to have dinner with 800.”⁹²

Finally, we need to understand the implications a close friendship can have on pastors who are also sinners like everyone else. Some men may find it easier to call a friend out on their sins than they would a stranger or an acquaintance. This would be considered quite rare though because friends typically try to remain friendly towards one another. As pastors, however, we need to be somewhat comfortable with the idea of conflict, the idea of being a minister of the law – even with our friends.

It takes a lot of conflict to solve problems in the short term. And, you know, if that can spiral up to where it's dangerous, which it can if it gets unrolled, it might be safer in the short term to keep the water smooth and to not delve into those situations where conflict emerges. The problem with that is it's not a very good medium-to-long-term strategy, because there's a lot of times there are things you have to talk about. Because they're not going to go away.^{93 94}

91. Mattek interview

92. Novotny interview.

93. Jordan Peterson, “Jordan Peterson: Why Do Nice Guys Finish Last? (Must Watch).” March 26, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di2FM8WZISE>.

94. As pastors whos' primary care is for individual souls, we take this quote—coming from a secular psychologist—with a grain of salt and a pastoral heart.

“If I'm in a position where I have to admonish a member as their pastor, I'm not doing that as their friend. I'm doing that in the capacity of my office publicly on behalf of the congregation.”⁹⁵

One thing you can find peace in is that as a pastor, you can still be a genuine friend to people even if you can't be a friend to everyone. Pastor Novotny said,

there are people I'm friends with at church, and there's some that I'm not, and that's okay. I will love the people that are not my friends. The fact that there are people I don't want to take a vacation with doesn't make me a bad pastor or a bad person. It makes me an actual friend. . . . Jesus was sinless. And he spent more time with James, John and Peter than he did with Thomas, Philip and Nathaniel, so apparently, that's okay.⁹⁶

Maintaining relationships with potentially thousands of people can be daunting and even seem impossible. Jesus became a man with human limitations during his thirty-three years on earth. His perfect example provides us sinners with a *descriptive* organizational tool when it comes to maintaining relationships with our members.

The Rockstar Pastor

In recent years, I have observed something I have never seen in the church before. I call it the Rock Star Syndrome. There is a new generation of church leaders who are treated like rock stars. They are elevated. They are exalted. They are the stars of the show. When people come to church and the Rock Star is not present, the “audience” feels cheated. One senses that if this leader were to leave that church, many of the attendees would leave also. The crowds are not there to engage in the life of the body of Christ. They aren't there to discover their gifts and faithfully serve. They have come to taste the flavor of the month.⁹⁷

No matter how many times it is drilled into our pastor skulls that our number one goal is to point people to Jesus, our sinful natures want to drag us into the narcissistic pit of believing that people

95. Cerny interview.

96. Novotny interview.

97. Harney, *Leadership from the inside out*, 33.

come to church to hear us hit another sermon out of the park. Maybe you disagree with the previous section and believe you can maintain close relationships with all 3,000 of your members. And who can blame you? When a call comes in every six months to the day, some members refuse to break your handshake until they have successfully informed you that you have Yao Ming's size 18 shoes that any Spud Webb who comes after you couldn't possibly fill.

Hopefully I am setting up a strawman with the previous paragraph – but the *WELS Rockstar Pastor* is not an eradicated term. So how do we ensure that—as we build relationships with our members—we don't fall into this category? How do we protect ourselves from this *rockstar syndrome* that could so easily put our members' focus on us and distract them from Christ?

First of all, having people join your church because they appreciate your communication style is not in-and-of-itself a bad thing. Some people may walk into your church for the first time “because they connect with a communication style, ‘it makes sense to me, I get it, I find it relevant to my life.’”⁹⁸ Pastors are, with all due respect to myself and my readers, theological nerds. Laypeople aren't. People want to find a place that feels welcoming and meaningful to them. No one will care if we have the greatest news this world has ever known if we sound like Ben Stein in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* when we teach and preach. Put yourself in their shoes.

If you're in Milwaukee, there are some churches where, if I said, ‘you have to attend this church for the next 20 years,’ you'd probably die inside even though the theology is good. There are just some people who communicate in ways that you connect with. Now, when people compromise that because they like communication style more than a theology – that's what breaks our hearts.⁹⁹

98. Novotny interview.

99. Novotny interview.

Some people may stay at a church because their pastor has gone to hell and back with them in their spiritual lives.

That will always be the case—wherever you serve—that there are people who will just latch on to you because you played a significant role in their spiritual life. ... That's a sign of really good things happening. So, you don't want to totally avoid that. But you also—as much as possible—along the way, while you're shepherding your people, want to emphasize what it is that really is addressing their heart. It's not you. It's the message that you are privileged to bring them.¹⁰⁰

There are a few positive reasons a member might stick with a church because of his or her pastor; but when that happens, we simply need to remind them “what it is that really calms their hearts. It's not me. It's what I was able to share with you. And just emphasizing that on a regular basis is a good, healthy thing.”¹⁰¹

What if you think some of your members—who may even be your friends—might not have as pure of motives? “If you're a shepherd that is concerned with serving the people that God gives you to care for, you're always going to be evaluating that in your mind, especially the longer you stay.”¹⁰² The duration of time a pastor serves in a parish can significantly impact how the people view him. “The longer you're there, the more danger there is that you start to become kind of a second Messiah and, it's great if people love you, but if you know yourself, if you start feeding off of that attention, then maybe we're going into dangerous territory.”¹⁰³

Does this mean that a pastor needs to take a call after he has been at a church for a certain amount of time? Not necessarily. Longer pastorates can be—and typically are—very helpful when it comes to building a church culture and a pastor's ability to know and serve his people.

100. Mattek interview.

101. Mattek interview.

102. Scharf interview.

103. Scharf interview.

However, if you are at a church for a long time and “the people start thinking that you’re God and Jesus is not, then you have to go.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps no member would actually say this—or even think of it in those terms—but pastors need to guard themselves carefully against becoming such close friends with members that their relationship with their members supersedes their members’ relationships with Jesus.

One pastor said this about guarding himself from the rockstar syndrome,

I always make sure I have a handful of members who will level with me. Those members can help you understand if you so-called ‘lost your voice,’ and if people are tuning you out. Improving yourself through Bible classes, sharpening your skills through Bible study and keeping yourself fresh usually stave that off. Because if you’re feeding your members new wineskins as well as old and all that good stuff, that’s probably not going to happen.¹⁰⁵

Aside from having members who are willing to call you out and keep you informed on the scuttlebutt of the congregation, in order to guard yourself from the rockstar syndrome, you will need to constantly remind your people that

pastors are sinners. We’re a bunch of sinners saved by Jesus, just like all of our members are. And this, by the way, is one of my favorite mantras for building relationships. “We’re just a bunch of sinners saved by Jesus.” I would say that to my members over and over and over again. ... It just puts us at a baseline. This is the truth about us. So, what do we expect sinners to do? We expect them to sin, but we also know they’re forgiven. We’re saved by Jesus. We’re going to be able to treat each other with forgiving love.¹⁰⁶

“Let them know that the treasure is in the jar of clay, it’s not the jar of clay.”¹⁰⁷ If your members see you as a jar of clay, there’s no way they’ll ever think you’re a rockstar.

104. WELS pastor (A) interview.

105. WELS pastor (A) interview.

106. Kock interview.

107. Wenzel interview.

Delegation

The word *delegation* brings either a sense of relief or a feeling of terror to a pastor. Some pastors hear this word and immediately realize the load that will be taken off their shoulders if only they could delegate some clerical work. Others hear this word as nothing more than a way to lose touch with their members. Either way, pastors need to be master delegators.

When you are the only one doing all the work, “the more Bible studies and clerical work you're doing—anything that involves a lot of prep work—your relationship with your people suffers. They just have to because the time isn't there. ... For everything that I add to serve the church as a whole, that takes time away from serving the church on an individual basis.”¹⁰⁸

Pastor David Scharf approached it this way,

I would delegate to multiply, not delegate to give up. So, in a lot of ways, whenever I delegated, we didn't lose touch, we got closer. So, thinking of my outreach people, the callers, and that kind of thing, I didn't delegate that so I could give up doing that. I wanted to share that experience with my members. And the fact that you've got another person with a shared experience that's going to come to you and talk about whatever calls they had or challenging issues or, whatever it may be, will only bring you closer to that person.¹⁰⁹

Of course, a pastor could be tempted to delegate to give up, hoping that he can spend all his time doing the ministry he enjoys rather than the ministry for which he is responsible. However, the pastor is the one who is called to be a public minister of the gospel. While handing shut in visits off to members who are willing to do them will free up a pastor's schedule for other ministries, Pastor David Wenzel issued this warning,

I see too many of our churches delegating ministry to the elderly. ... I just had a heartfelt conversation with a lady in her 80's who feels neglected and ignored and forgotten. And then they're sending somebody out as the visitation person who's not a pastor. And that's not wrong to do it, but we're doing it more and more often. She said, “Pastor, we're

108. Cerny interview.

109. Scharf interview.

vulnerable.” And I think I don't appreciate that enough. The elderly – we look at them and say, “well, they're rock-solid in their faith. God has blessed them with fourscore and 10 years. And they're just waiting for heaven, and they're eager to see Jesus.” And they are, but they also have the same struggles as everyone else.¹¹⁰

These situations are not always black-and-white. The goal is always the member's relationship with Jesus. If the member's relationship with Jesus will be harmed because the pastor—the one who received a divine call to shepherd the members of his church—is not the one visiting, then the pastor will not delegate that visit. However, there may be times when the pastor's relationship with his member is lessened while his member's relationship with Jesus is strengthened through hearing the gospel from someone else. In that case, the pastor is welcome—and encouraged—to delegate that visit.

A key point to remember when delegating as a pastor is that your members “are still comfortable coming to you when they need something.”¹¹¹ We never want to be the pastor who has delegated so much ministry onto his laypeople, telling them not to bother us with anything unless it's a life-or-death situation, so that when our members do see us, they think they must be dying. “Being very intentional about maintaining those relationships [with every member], especially in a larger setting, that has to be a priority. But—I would say, a higher priority than establishing personal relationships with every member of your flock—you really need to be intentional about developing healthy relationships with your ministry team.”¹¹²

110. Wenzel interview.

111. WELS pastor (B) interview.

112. Mattek interview.

Since we're still talking about maintaining relationships with your members, we should note that delegating gospel ministry to lay members is not going to make the gospel powerless simply because it isn't coming from the pastor.

It's the gospel which is the power of God for salvation, not the pastor. There is no place in Scripture that says the pastor is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. We need to recognize that it is the gospel that works and builds faith. And if I can't have a close relationship with all of my parishioners but I can find legit ways to get the gospel to them, I'm good with that. It's not my relationship with them that's going to get people to heaven. It's the gospel.¹¹³

You can enhance the gospel ministry, your ministry team, and your relationships with members by rotating and expanded your ministry team. "One mistake pastors make is to look for someone who is willing, not someone who will do it well. The art is to look for someone who will do it well, not someone who is willing."¹¹⁴ If you are constantly reaching out to the same few people who are willing to do anything and everything to serve their church, you may unintentionally rob others of the opportunity to serve. You will also likely produce sub-par products by the hands of people who are willing but are not able to do their job well.

Jesus walked with his disciples

Jesus had *frequent* and *long-term contact* with those whom he equipped. ... Jesus and his disciples spent most of three years on the road, *walking!*¹¹⁵

113. Kock interview.

114. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership*, 165.

115. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 102-3 Emphasis original.

After a seminary graduate has been assigned to his first congregation, installed, and his family has gone back home, he will likely find himself spending that solid 20—24 hours writing his first sermon. He will spend several more hours preparing Bible study. Then, he will spend the rest of his week trying to figure out what in the world he has gotten himself into. As the years go on—you veteran pastors know—those times will be reduced, but he will have the experience to know what other ministries require his attention – much of which will also be done in the office.

Members will come to his office for counseling or to ask questions or just to check in on their pastor. Many will drive by the church and see his car in the parking lot, they will shake his hand when they walk through the doors on Sunday morning, and they just might catch a glimpse of him driving to the office on their way to work. The rest of the week, if they think of their pastor, they will envision him sitting in his office, driving to the office, or chuckle at that one time they saw him at the liquor store purchasing wine for communion. In their minds, the pastor works only in his office.

Don't let that be the case. *Smell like your sheep* doesn't mean you and your flock should share the aroma of the wooden pews in the church. "How can shepherds equip saints to do their ministry in one hour a week of formal class time, transmitting mere information to a classroom full of people at different stages and with varying needs?"¹¹⁶ What may enhance a pastor's ability to do this is if the pastor were to get out of his office to be with his people in their lives; or, invite the sheep to be a part of his life.

It is vitally important that a pastor spends time in his office preparing for worship, Bible studies, and making sure the ship is running smoothly. It is equally important that he spends time with his people.

116. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 103.

Know the Word, know your people, and know how to connect the Word to your people. You're never going to get to number three unless you do number two. Seminary gives number one—you're going to have to keep honing that for the rest of your life. But you won't know how to get the Word to your people unless you spend time with them and get to know them. And that initiative is really an important part of ministry.¹¹⁷

“During their travels with him, the Twelve saw Jesus in nearly every conceivable life setting.”¹¹⁸ “Certainly a pastor will have to guard against making so many calls which are largely social or recreational in nature that he uses up time which ought to be devoted to careful preparation of his sermons.”¹¹⁹ However, “you're never wasting your time when you're with people.”¹²⁰ There are so many ways a pastor can get out of his office and engage in the lives of his members. Make sure you are not the pastor who is “pulling out of the driveway and dropping the garage door and waving at the guys raking his leaves. Be out there, shoulder to shoulder with them. They'll be happy to see their pastor with a blue collar on and not just a white collar.”¹²¹ “When there are things like workdays, the importance of the pastor showing up and working are huge because you get a chance to interact with your members at a totally different level.”¹²²

“The backyard barbecue might be a better equipping place than the Sunday-morning podium.”¹²³ Pastor Thomas Kock makes an effort to “show up at school every morning to greet the kids as they come into school—giving fist bumps to all these kids as they're coming in, taking the time when I've got kids out in the playground to stop out on the playground with

117. WELS pastor (A) interview.

118. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 109.

119. Schuetze and Habeck. *The Shepherd under Christ*, 142.

120. Kock interview.

121. Wenzel interview.

122. Kock interview.

123. Anderson, *They Smell like Sheep*, 112.

them.”¹²⁴ There are all sorts of fun things a pastor can do with his members. If you get a chance to “go to the corn maze, go to the corn maze. You’ll get a chance to do an outdoor service and then have some outdoor games afterwards. Those are the kinds of times when you’ll let them see that you’re a real person and that you enjoy fun stuff too.”¹²⁵

Another great way to get into the lives of your members is to celebrate with them.

As a pastor, you get to be part of the biggest moments and biggest celebrations of people’s lives, and they want you to be there. Make yourself available for those things. It always breaks my heart when pastors will say, “ah, you know, there are too many confirmation parties to go to, so I just don’t go to any of them.” That’s insane! I mean, it used to be a fun joke of ours where the members knew, “Pastor Scharf has six minutes here, he can spend six minutes and then he’s got to go.” And of course, they weren’t bitter about it or anything. They were like, “man, that’s so awesome that you’re trying to make it to all the parties.” ... If you can at all do it, do it. Go.¹²⁶

“Every month, we do what’s called supper club. We rotate houses.”¹²⁷ As important as it is for pastors to get into the lives of their members, it is equally important to allow members into the lives of pastors. “Bring them into your turf, into your house. That can be a huge thing so that you’re gathering outside of the church and letting them see where you normally operate.”¹²⁸

When people envision their pastor, hopefully they see more than a building or an office. We hope they see a man who wants to be a part of their lives as much as he wants them to be a part of his. Hopefully, they see a reflection of Christ, who maintained his relationships with his disciples by walking with them outside the walls of the synagogue.

124. Kock interview.

125. Kock interview.

126. Scharf interview.

127. Novotny interview.

128. Mattek interview.

Family

I'm also a husband and a father. And that relationship dare not be crucified on the altar of ministry.¹²⁹

It is extremely difficult for a pastor to find a balance between his work life and his home life. Pastors are—in a sense—always on. You are not called to a 9:00—5:00 job. You don't clock out. You're always on call. There is a tremendous weight on your shoulders to ensure the doctrinal integrity of your church because you are held accountable by God to feed and protect his flock. The workload of a pastor is limitless; there is always more ministry that can be done.

If you are single because you have the gift of Paul or because you are waiting on God's timing, you cannot allow that to be a reason to neglect your other vocations as a son, friend, uncle, nephew, etc. "The temptation is to throw all the work on them. 'You don't have a wife and kids.' [No, but] he's also responsible for everything in his life. If you have a wife at home, is she doing your laundry? Well, [single pastors] are doing theirs."¹³⁰

If you are married, you must remember that your first calling is to be the pastor of your flock at home. You are their shepherd first.

Your primary care for your relationships has to be within your house. I mean, you have to see that as a higher priority than serving your flock. Your family is your first flock and they always go where you are. You're their pastor too and they happen to be the only people that work with you, wherever you are, wherever you happen to go and whose lives are significantly impacted by the day-to-days of ministry. That has to be a priority too. Sometimes you're going to have to make hard choices about spending time shepherding your family versus spending time shepherding the rest of your flock, and you can't do both. I would urge any pastor that if you have to make a choice—and sometimes it's one or the other—that you shepherd your family first every time.¹³¹

129. Kock interview.

130. Cerny interview.

131. Mattek interview.

Closing Thoughts

It's Monday morning. You wake up remembering all the things that need to get done and the people you need to see. You are the shepherd of this flock. Your members expect those things to get done. They expect to see their *pastor*, their *counselor*, and their *friend*. You may be tackled by a myriad of self-doubting questions. Instead of allowing those question to overcome you, you open your Bible to listen to the voice of your Shepherd. As you go into a new week with his strength, you thank God for the opportunity to be a shepherd among his sheep, that he allows you to be a pastor and enjoy the relationships you have built and maintained with your members.

Creating close relationships with members is not a new or original idea. It dates back to generations of WELS pastors—now in the saints triumphant—whose pictures hang on the walls of the lower levels of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. It dates back to the Apostles and, most importantly, to Christ. He is the one who calls us his friends (Jn 15:13-15). He is the one who commissioned us to go and make disciples for him by preaching the gospel (Mt 28:19-20). He is the one who called us to be shepherds of his flock (1 Pt 5:2). Pastors can carry out this Great Commission of making *disciples* best when they build close relationships with the flock whom the Good Shepherd has entrusted into their care.

For Further Study

Certain opportunities for additional research fell outside the scope of this paper, including the following questions. They would be possible starting points for continuing this study.

- What is the role of a pastor's wife in the congregation?
- Considering a pastor's relationship with his members, does the WELS need to reconsider the minimum time of four years before he is eligible to be put on a call list?
- What is a pastor's role in the community outside of the church?

APPENDIX 1: PAID POSITIONS

We've talked briefly about pastor burnout, which is a very real, relevant issue. But what about volunteer burnout? In every church there will likely be a core group of members who will volunteer for everything. There will be other members who need to be mandatorily volunteered to do much of anything. There will be even more who refuse to volunteer for anything even if the pastor twists their arms to the point of making them look like Twizzlers. This can be a point of great frustration for the pastor... it can also be a point of frustration for the members. As called and paid workers of the church, we need to realize that we "eat, sleep, and drink this stuff. They do not."¹³²

Delegation is a great way to allow your members to practice their faith by serving their church. It is also true that almost 50% of our churches worship less than fifty people a week. In a church that size, it is fiscally necessary to run mainly on volunteers—and a church can do very well with volunteers.

However, if a church has the resources, it needs to be open to the idea of paid positions. You can't make all your volunteer positions require near-full-time work. It may work for some individuals who have the time to give to your church to volunteer twenty-plus hours a week to the church, but it won't work for everyone. "St. Mark, De Pere is a church of 2,500—2,700 members with two pastors right now. But they've really leaned on part-time staff for various

132. WELS pastor (A) interview.

things. And that's where we really see an expansion in our staff.”¹³³ A church this size could not possibly run efficiently on volunteers alone. Again, a volunteer might be willing, but they also might not be the best person for the job. If you want the best person for the job, you may need to be willing to pay for it.

Members have jobs and families and they'll burnout. They're working fifty hours a week. If I want someone to lead our group ministry, that's a 20 hour a week job. You'd have to create a part time position. ... I think that St. Mark's secret sauce is they're not paying a \$70,000 salary plus benefits. They're paying someone for 15 hours a week to lead groups or do social media. And so, it's affordable on the church budget and it gets done really, really well. Because, what volunteer or what Pastor would have 15 hours a week for social media?¹³⁴

Creating paid positions may not just be good for the church as a whole, it will likely be good for your individual members. As their pastor, you need to be conscious of their other vocations as well.

If they have a job and a marriage—I want that to be healthy—and they have kids and I want them to be discipling their families with home devotions, and I want them to be evangelists or investing in their neighbors. How many hours can they devote to the church? And if they only have two hours a week to give, maybe this program isn't going to be great. ... I want someone to lead the life group ministry, and I have ten life group leaders, so we're going to need support, check-ins, encouragement, structure, promotion, organization. It's not going to be good on two hours a week.¹³⁵

One goal of creating paid positions is to clear up the pastor's schedule so he is able to do the things he was called by his church to do. If the pastor is the only paid worker in the church and he has been called to be a minister of the gospel, he may find himself “limiting those opportunities if in the back of his head is his schedule thinking, ‘okay, but I have all this other

133. Novotny interview.

134. Novotny interview.

135. Novotny interview.

stuff that needs to get done as well.”¹³⁶ If he has a paid staff, he will hopefully be able to give more time to his members—maintaining those relationships—and, in turn, be more effective in preaching the gospel.

136. Cerny interview.

APPENDIX 2: ENCOURAGEMENTS FROM EIGHT WELS PASTORS

Balance the time you spend in the Word with the time you spend in God's people; because if it tips too much on one side or the other, there are problems. You want to be involved in the congregation, but if you don't have anything to offer them – you're a mile wide and an inch deep.¹³⁷

Always remember, you're a pastor—and you're their pastor—but that doesn't mean you're always pastoring them 24/7. Your greatest tool is not your personality. It's not your conversational skills, or your horizontal relationships that you build with your members. Your greatest gift is going to be your Savior's relationship with you and how God allows you the blessing of strengthening your members' relationships with Jesus and pointing them to Jesus' relationship with them.¹³⁸

Give yourself a lot of grace. You don't have to have this all figured out. The moment you arrive on scene, you'll likely feel at least a little bit of pressure to do the 18,000 things that you've been looking forward to doing. And, you think, “if I'm not doing all of them immediately, then I must really suck as a pastor.” But just give yourself a little grace to go very slowly.¹³⁹

I try to keep my expectations for people before me. And my expectation, or what I want for them, is for them to be in heaven. I want them to grow in their faith. And when you keep that in your mind, you're willing to not only have difficult conversations, but you're not a professional pastor. You don't think of people as “Oh, this is a waste of my time. I've got real work I have to get to.” But when you when you understand, “no, this person is the reason I am here,” it's easier to love them and build that relationship.¹⁴⁰

Professor Deutschlander, who's now in the saints triumphant ... said to one of my classmates, “there's nothing you could ever do that would change my opinion of you.” And my buddy said, “come on, if I went out and murdered somebody or raped somebody or something, surely your opinion of me would change!” “No, not a bit. ... I know who you are. You're a sinful human being, and as a sinful human being you're capable of anything. You are capable of murder, just like David. You are capable of having an affair, just like David. ... But I also know that you're saved by Jesus because Jesus died and rose and paid for the sins of the whole world. As long as you're on this side of eternity, those two truths about you will never change. So, I know who you are. And because of that, my opinion of you will never change.” Approaching people that way is

137. WELS pastor (B) interview.

138. Wenzel interview.

139. Mattek interview.

140. Scharf interview.

super helpful because it gives you reasonable expectations: sinners are going to sin. So, you're not going to be shocked when your sinners sin. You're not going to be shocked when *this* sinner sins. (I'm pointing at myself just to clarify for the record). But you're saved by Jesus. Jesus loves me just as much as he loves you, and He loves you just as much as he loves me. And when you treat people with that understanding, the relationship is built on something solid and real.¹⁴¹

Always remember ministry is about relationships with people. That's where it's got to start. If you start losing sight of the fact that ministry is about people, you're dead in the water. It's not all about getting smarter. It's about you personally growing in the Word, but it's not about you spending eight hours a day in your office: reading books, taking notes, [etc.]. I think that there can be a temptation for guys that after you've gone through seven years of classroom work ... that we can maybe start to get the impression that ministry is academic. It's not – not at all. Your people could not care less how smart you are. They want someone that cares about them, and someone they can relate to. Get to know your people. And the other thing is, when you get your first congregation, go in there realizing you're the outsider, you're the foreigner, you are the one who at that point in time does not belong. You have people in that congregation that may have been a part of that church since before you were born. Get to know them. Your job your first year is to shut up and observe. You're going to sit there and you'll be able to come up with a list of things that you think need to be done differently. That's fine. You make that list. And then you put it away in a drawer, in an envelope that says, "Do not open till next year." Even as you grow within your congregation, it can become easy to lose sight of the fact that ministry is about people. When ministry starts to become about organization and programs, then you've lost it. Your pastoral ministry always has to be about your people.¹⁴²

At the CORE, from the start, there was always just a culture here where it's a little bit grittier. It's a little bit edgier. I think I can do things and I can confess things that are super well received because that's who we are. If I had a call to St. Paul's, a couple blocks away, I'd have to edit my language to make sure I'm serving those people well. There's a tension of wanting to be authentic and also wanting to serve the people you're serving because they're unique people. And then, I think, don't just be a people-pleaser. Whatever you pick, do it in good conscience. And if someone doesn't like it, if you would have chosen a different option, someone wouldn't have liked that either. I've had to come to terms with that. But if I wouldn't have made any friends at this church, there would be a hundred great things I would have missed out on and I would have had regrets about that too.¹⁴³

141. Kock interview.

142. Cerny interview.

143. Novotny interview.

If Jesus loves everybody than we should too. Some people don't have the stamina to keep up with those who are constantly knocking them down - and that's just fine. But for those of us who are of the cloth, those are the people we are called to save.¹⁴⁴

144. WELS pastor (A) interview.

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