

Gary Harder and Lydia Neufeld Harder, October 5, 2014 – Retreat

“Spiritual (Pastoral) leadership”

Text: Romans 12: 3-13

Introduction

Gary:

Today we want to look at pastoral, spiritual leadership for the church. Pastoral leadership does not necessarily need to be filled by a pastor. We use the word pastoral here as “caring for the people in a way which reflects the way God cares for us all”. There are models of churches (eg. Fort Garry Mennonite in Winnipeg) who have filled this spiritual leadership role without having a leader designated as a pastor.

(We do want to acknowledge our own biases here. We do not want to colour MFM’s decisions around leadership with our biases, but we want to be upfront with them. These lie in two places. 1) We think that “designated” and accountable leadership touched by a sense of calling from God is preferable to undesignated leadership which is more difficult to hold accountable. 2) Our own experience as pastors (Gary for almost 50 years, Lydia for 6) and as teachers of pastors, leave us both with an overwhelming sense of loving our calling. We are biased in that direction).

In our opinion every church/fellowship does need designated pastoral and spiritual leadership. Right from the beginning of the church in the New Testament there were clear spiritual leadership roles in place, though the word “pastor” was not used right at the beginning. Church history much later came to be dominated by pastors and bishops and popes, a very hierarchical style of pastoral leadership.

This held true until the Anabaptist movement challenged that top heavy spiritual leadership model. You might remember earlier input sessions where we talked about the Anabaptist movement being born as a totally lay movement – lay people baptized each other without benefit of clergy. But within two years, as exemplified by the Schleitheim confession of faith, pastoral leadership offered by a pastor, seemed to be essential. We talked then of the healthy tension between these two impulses – lay led and pastor led – throughout our Mennonite history.

But to explore what we want and need in terms of spiritual leadership for MFM, we need to look again at how we understand church. We need to first ask, “How do we understand church”. And then we ask about the kind of spiritual leadership we need to lead the church to where we want to go. Some of you really like the image of being a fellowship, almost like a smaller house church. Others of you like the image of a more

established church with all the services in place that a full-fledged church offers. And yet there are many more options as we saw yesterday in our game called “Church”.

Today we want to take a “play-full” look at three different models of church. We are kind of exploring this on the run, as it were. There are dozens of models of church, many coming directly from the New Testament. The two prominent texts are Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. But we want to look at three rather more unusual models, and ask what each of them would need in terms of pastoral leadership. Hopefully this will stimulate our thinking and creativity related to what it is we want and need here at MFM. Preparing this sermon has been kind of fun for us, but also a bit scary. We waver between thinking this is being creative and being rather foolish.

Gary will present these models, and Lydia will act as a kind of “devil’s advocate” by challenging them.

1) The church as a clock (perhaps a grandfather clock?) – Pastoral leadership as timekeepers and fixers and administrators.

The church should run like a well-functioning clock, telling time accurately and chiming out the hours of the day (chiming out the Good News of God?). In this image it is God who crafted the clock, the church, and then expects the spiritual leadership to keep it running. To run smoothly and well the church needs to be well organized, with a committee structure that is clear, and has a careful outline of the tasks each committee needs to do.

Pastoral leadership is charged with the task of seeing that the clock runs smoothly and keeps time. It is very task oriented. Oil the machinery regularly. Make sure each committee is functioning efficiently and that all assigned tasks are done and done well.

And when the clock is broken and doesn’t keep proper time anymore, pastoral leadership sees to it that the clock is fixed, that the proper repairs are done. A primary role, thus, is to keep the clock clean and well-oiled, and functioning well.

In many ways this is “modernity’s” answer to making the church relevant to our culture. The key words are organization, structure, tasks, and efficiency. Pastoral leadership is needed both to fix problems quickly, but also to do a number of the tasks that need to be done. This leadership should be very professional, with a high skill set.

I like this image because I do value organization and efficiency. After all, in the Myers/Briggs scheme of things I am a strong “J”. But I also like it because of a personal family story.

My father was 17 years old when he fled Russia for Canada together with his younger sister and his ailing mother. They got as far as Rosthern, Sask., on their way to Alberta when his mother, my grandmother could go no further. She was dying of cancer. They had brought along a treasured Kroeger clock which dad hung up in her hospital room. But it stopped ticking. On the journey something had broken. For some reason it was important for grandma to have the clock repaired. So dad brought it away to be fixed. It was a comfort for my dying grandmother when she heard the clock ticking again. Somehow, in a time of chaos and despair, a working clock was a symbol of order amidst the confusion. It calmed her down. She died in peace.

Lydia – But Gary, aren't there problems with the image of church as a clock? Is keeping order and keeping time a big enough purpose for church? Where is the future vision? Keeping time is oriented to the present more than to the future. It is hard to vision a big enough future when you are preoccupied with keeping time and fixing what is broken and trying your best to be very efficient. What is the church's "mission" in this image? Is it just going round and round again like a clock? Even chiming out Good News sounds a bit "Programed", a bit mechanical. And doesn't this image see people too much only for what they can do, for their function? And where is the creativity? Where is the feeling, the emotions?

And there is another temptation, I think. How much do you really need God in this image? God crafted the clock of course, and thanksgiving is in order. But do you really need God to keep it running? We say we do, of course, but it's hard to pray for guidance when you already have all the expertise you need to run everything efficiently. Altogether this image sounds just a bit too "mechanical", too technical, too programmed.

And aren't clocks, particularly grandfather clocks a bit old-fashioned? How does "time-keeping" change in this computerized age?

And yet, I agree, there is something to be said for the image of church as a clock, and of pastoral leadership there to help the clock run well. It is very comforting to know that organizationally everything is working smoothly and well and efficiently and competently, and that Good News is periodically chimed out.

Gary :

2) The church as village – Pastoral leadership as mayor and council.

The old saying tells us that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it takes a village mind-set to raise a church.

A village has many different pieces, all there to see to the well-being of all the villagers. There is a library, a school, a hospital, a senior's home, an ice-rink, a grocery store, a Tim Horton's, maybe even a post-office. In other words, there are services available for most of the needs of the villagers. Of course some needs can only be met in a larger center – we think here of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church Eastern Canada - but the villagers like to think of themselves as rather self-sufficient.

Some people, usually a village council with a mayor, are chosen by the villagers to see to it that all of these services are available and are accessible for everyone. They are charged with the responsibility of overseeing the “whole”, of looking out for the health of the “system” – that is, of the whole village. All parts of the system are interrelated. The leaders try to make sure that every citizen is looked after, and this can only happen if all parts of the system are healthy. There is attention paid to a reliable infrastructure.

The key to a healthy system is communication. There needs to be good communication between all the service providers. There needs to be good communication with all the citizens, engaging them about their well-being and their needs. Communication is a primary responsibility of the mayor and council.

People do move in and out of the village. People moving out are given a good send-off, and people moving in are welcomed and made to feel at home.

The central motif of the village is hospitality and welcome. People feel at home. And new villagers are welcomed into the many services, and into many homes. Neighbors all know each other and visit across the fence – if there is one.

In church as village, there is a lot of focus on God's hospitality, and especially on Jesus, the exemplar of hospitality. The church looks to Jesus to learn about hospitality and inclusion and openness and peace and conflict resolution and how to live with your neighbor. It looks to Jesus to learn how to live out God's hospitality and love. It looks to Jesus to learn how to include the poor and the vulnerable.

Pastoral leadership of church as village has two primary foci – 1) the health of the system (the whole village) making sure that all the services are in place and that the community is healthy. 2) Pastoral care, looking to the well-being and health of each person in the community.

I like this image of the church for several reasons. One, it looks to the health of the whole – the church as a system, as well as to the health of each member. And I like the emphasis on Jesus in whom we ground our identity and our way of living faithfully.

Lydia:

Yes, but. There are temptations with this image too. One is to pay more attention to some villagers than to others, to the louder voices, or to the ones with most influence - or money. The temptation for leaders is to see the villagers more as tax payers than as citizens, more concerned with keeping taxes low so that they will vote them in again, than with providing all the needed services which may come at a higher cost. The temptation for citizens is to see themselves as consumers of services rather than as participants in village building. The challenge is to invite everyone to see themselves primarily as participants in a grand community of God's people rather than as only taxpayers and consumers of services.

And, let's face it - villagers are often tempted to become rather exclusive, not wanting to let new folks in. Villagers are often not ready for change, they are most comfortable with old ways of doing things.

And we know that communication often does break down. Some people are always left out of the loop, for one reason or another.

And yet there is much to be said for the image of the church as a village, with the mayor and council looking after the needs of the village as a whole, and also of each individual resident. It is very comforting to know that leadership is hard at work building a healthy community as well as healthy individuals.

Gary:

3) A choir. Church as a choir and pastoral leadership as conductors of the music.

A third image is that of church as a choir singing the praises of God. This image would suggest that the primary purpose of the church is to worship God. It is worship which renews our spirits, and which inspires us to live out the good news of God's love. Worship is what enables us to live fully into our own potential, and to live in such a way that others are drawn into joining the choir. Worship recognizes the "other", that which is beyond us. It recognizes transcendence.

The choir is made up of many different voices, voices of all ages, of many ethnic and racial colours, of diverse backgrounds and theological colouring, of differing sexual orientations. It's a challenge to get this bunch singing together from the same page – and in full four part harmony. That is the challenge facing spiritual leadership – training the choir to sing in harmony, in tune, and in time.

But that isn't yet enough. Technical competence does not yet make great music. Listening to each other to get the harmony sounding right isn't yet enough. The choir has to reach much deeper – it has to learn to listen to the spirit and interpretation and passion and life of the music, to what the composer dreamed was possible. It has to listen to the Spirit of God to try to be in tune with God's music. The center of this listening is to engage the Bible deeply. Pastoral leadership offers Biblical and theological depth. It is grounded and centered in the story of God.

And then of course, the choir must sing for others, not only for itself. It is not enough just to keep on practicing and enjoying the sounds of its' own singing. In the end the choir exists for mission, to sing for others, to draw others into worship, to sing God's song into every situation whether that is a situation of joy or of deep distress. The choir must be in tune with its context!

I like the image of church as a choir because of its focus on worship and on being grounded. Biblically. It is a focus on meeting God, on paying attention to the Holy Spirit. The conductors, pastoral leadership, must be especially gifted in leading worship, in listening to the spirit music of God, on depth understanding of the Bible and of the context in which the music takes place.

Singing sacred music is a deeply spiritual thing.

Lydia:

Yes, but. There are some problems besetting this image of church as choir too, aren't there. We hear so much today about the "worship wars". Many churches are divided and even torn apart by different "needs" or different "wants" or different likes and dislikes in worship. Some choir members want only traditional music, the old well-loved hymns, the old liturgies, the old ways of understanding the Bible or even just Bach! These help them to relate to God. And other singers are more in touch with the contemporary music taste, they want to be creative making their own music, even improvising on the melody, even jazz. We are all, in some ways captured by our culture in our music making, aren't we? And we all have a pre-set idea of what is really God's music! How do we discern the Spirit as we make music?

And choir smacks a bit of mere "performing" rather than authentic music making. When performing becomes a way of life, we may be in danger of losing our authenticity and resorting to play-acting.

And what do we do with those who seem always to sing too loudly, or, God forbid, out of tune? And how do we choose music that goes deep into our souls rather than only the fluff that only goes as far as our feet?

And yet there is something to be said for church as a choir making beautiful music which touches the deepest part of our being in true worship, and which can reach into the hearts of others as they too hear the music of God. There is something to be said for pastoral leadership which is tuned to the harmonies of Scripture and theology and human nature and the larger context of our world.

Gary:

Summary (a Trinitarian completeness)

1. Church as clock.

Focus on God the creator, as “Father” God.

Pastoral leadership seen as organizational geniuses and efficient fixers. Mission is periodically chiming out good news.

2. Church as village.

Focus on Jesus.

Pastoral leadership specializes in pastoral care of the system and each person, and in relationship building and communication.

Mission is radical hospitality.

3. Church as choir.

Focus on the Holy Spirit.

Pastoral leadership has primary gifts in Worship and Bible and theology.

The mission is to sing God’s song wherever we go and to bring the presence of God into every situation.

Which image of Church touches your heart most deeply?

What models of pastoral leadership do you yearn for?