

KANSAS DISTRICT THEOLOGICAL CONVOCATION

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Ten Things Laity Look for in Partnership with Pastors by Ken Jorns

Section 1: Introductory comments about cows, and personal experiences....

In preparation for this exercise, I was handed a few resources. I solicited some resources, I did some (certainly not enough) personal research, and I have conferred with several individuals whose opinions I especially value. The input tends to cover more territory than I had envisioned. I shall try to boil it down.

Perhaps one place to start is that "Self-Evaluation" form that nearly every congregation, when vacant or at other times, finds itself wading through. I have assisted in filling out a couple of these. I have seen copies of the finished product as developed by some of my neighboring congregations, and one of my fellow Board Members even sent me one he had in his files from another parish in which he was a member a few years ago. There is always a section where the question is asked, "What gifts to you expect our Pastor to possess?" Comments often run from the sublime to the ridiculous (my opinion). However, if I may be so bold, it seems to me that if you hold the list of responses out at arms length and make an effort to categorize a bit, many of the responses may be lumped together into about 8 categories - remember now, I only needed 10.

Let's list a few of these categories quickly, and then we'll come back and review.

1. We want Strong Preaching - definitions of which may vary, according to who is doing the defining
2. We want Sound, Effective, and Excellent Teaching (again, definitions may vary)
3. Biblical Subject Knowledge, and faithfulness to Lutheran Doctrine
4. We want a person who demonstrates God's love and kindness - even if he is admonishing us - and boy do some of us ever need admonishing!
5. We need pastors who, when called upon to deal with our personal or family social needs, have knowledge in the area of spiritual counseling, knowledge of our community's social, caring and legal resources. Pastors who have sincere and caring attitudes toward their parishioners - "pastoral hearts" with DDT (discretion, diplomacy, and tact), pastors who will "listen to us" - you know those of us, who REALLY know how to run things. We want someone we can like and who likes us.
6. We need pastors with Leadership Skills (definitions may again vary)
7. We want our pastor to exhibit a "God-Pleasing" lifestyle. You know, perfect family life, Integrity, etc. We want your sons to be Eagle Scouts, and your Daughters to be National Merit Scholarship winners - or something like that. At the very least, domestic tranquility is a "good thing".
8. We want pastors who, in the interests of ministry to the congregation, and/or to the community, have the ability to develop personal relationships with ALL persons with which you could conceivably come into contact. Especially within the congregation, but also "on the outside" - PhDs/seven year old children, mansion dwellers/homeless, recent immigrants/bluebloods, Native Americans/4th generation Germans, SE Asians, Hispanics, Eastern Europeans - that's not asking too much, is it?
9. A good singing voice and good grooming.

Ok, so it's 9 categories. Now, let's take this list, and hold IT out at arm's length, give it good look and ask, "WHAT'S MISSING?" I think we need to add,

10. Proper, knowledgeable and appropriate administration of the Sacraments, and the Office of the Keys.

And far less often than it needs to be mentioned,

11. We need pastors with strengths in the areas of Outreach or Mission or Evangelism.

Hmmmmmmmmmm, I wonder why the LCMS is losing something like 20,000+ members per year? Hmmmmmmmmmm?

Section II

Peter referred to the early Christians as "a royal priesthood." That applies to us today - all of us. We are ALL God's representatives here on Earth. Much of Luther's struggles during the Reformation period had to do with his belief/teaching that ALL CHRISTIANS were priests before God, and therefore did not REQUIRE the presence of intermediary priests...i.e. the hierarchy of the Roman Church. So when the early Protestant churches were established WHAT WAS TO BE THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY? The question has bounced around Protestant Christendom for some 500 years.

If I may be so bold as to try to interpret Luther, I believe it was his view that although ALL CHRISTIANS were themselves priests before God, NOT ALL Christians were necessarily called to preach, or teach or administer the sacraments. Further, Luther held that the Office of the Clergy was instituted by God for the purpose of dedicating workers to these tasks - that is, it was desirable to surface people for these tasks, educate and train them in Scripture and Doctrine, and - once they were prepared - they should be "Called" by their congregations to undertake the PUBLIC MINISTRY of the calling congregation. To one degree or another, this view has held even to today, although the nuances have sometimes changed back and forth, forth and back through time.

Here endeth the OLD NEWS, which you folks all already knew, and we are going to turn to the OP. ED. section of Ken's views, and we're going to revisit that list of "Desirable Clergy Attributes." Are you ready? Let's Dance!

Do we want Powerful Preaching? You bet your bippy we do. But what does this mean? Does this mean "entertainment?" I am fearful that the terminology does imply "entertainment" to some. Still at the end of the day, you clergy have been "called" to preach the good news. And preach it you shall be expected to do. Here are my favorite three examples of Powerful Preaching: 1) Celebratory exuberance, 2) Application to intellect and 3) Law and Gospel, and you can neither go wrong, nor overdo Law and Gospel.

Excellence in Teaching/Sound Doctrine. Let's see, we only ask you to be fluent in Hebrew and in Greek and English. We've backed off some from German (although you may wish to revisit some of Luther's writings "straight from the source"). You get extra points for Aramaic and Latin, and TRIPLE POINTS for Spanish. I don't think that's asking too much (sarcasm alert). You should be able to explain the nuances of Christ's descent into humiliation and His ascent into exaltation equally well to a roomful of PhDs and to a class of 12 year old confirmands. That's not asking too much, is it? Sound doctrine and sound teaching fundamentals are the CORE of a pastor's job. It is your job to be the depository of sound doctrine, and to pass it on to

other “trustworthy” Christians - for them to continue the teaching. “Faith cometh from hearing.” Teach us, Teach us, Teach us.....

Biblical Subject Knowledge, and faithfulness to Lutheran Doctrine. Goes without saying.

Leadership skills. Yes, but motivate the laity. It is your job to teach, and preach and motivate, by holding Christ up as the center of our worship, the center of our earthly lives and the guide to our labors. Empower your parishioners to pay the bills, run the meetings, set the priorities and evaluate the budget and deal with the insurance needs. Your leadership tasks involve motivation and teaching.

“Pastoral hearts.” Goes without saying, but showing us how to deal with adversity is a good lesson, too.

A “People Person?” Ya Sure, You Betcha. Everyone wants the pastor to be THEIR own friend, but that is also an area where laity can learn and grow together into a more active congregation. You can’t be “all things to all people,” but you can be the person who continually points people toward Christ and the salvation earned for us by His blood. You can unite us in the Word and in the sacraments. And yes, I believe that the “Public Ministry” to which you are called requires a “Public Presence.” Be out and about. Be “in the world.”

Yes, we skipped a few - I’m going to lump them together and here’s why. These remaining areas have now become “resource areas.” You see, the fact that “all can directly approach God’s Throne of Grace without going through any human mediator” does NOT make clergy more expendable. INDEED, it raises new challenges for your position as a “called” leader in the “public” arena of ministry. It changes the job description more towards terms like “trainer” and “facilitator” and “resource person” and “motivator” and “Department Head” and “need identifier.” It’s a very good thing to have a pastor who assesses needs and undertakes to meet those needs himself. In some cases, it might be a “Better” thing (long-term) to have a pastor who assesses needs and can “work the system” to identify persons who might be interested in learning how to deal with the needs. There are training programs in nearly every congregational “need” from Christian Outreach to business management, from making music to making hospital calls. Most people want a pastor who can lead them to Spiritual growth AND opportunities for personal growth, service and involvement within the congregation. NOTE: I do NOT expect you to be a marriage counselor - unless you have professional training in that area. But I do hope you are knowledgeable about WHERE TO FIND a marriage counselor in your area. I don’t expect you to be able to deal with child custody issues or “child in need of care” issues, or the psychological ramifications to the adults immersed in or emerging from our “free loving” and “free living” society (unless you have training in these areas). But it is indeed a necessity to be knowledgeable about accessing the system of social services and secular legal matters. Just know where the resources are. I don’t expect you to be a hospice worker. But you need to know how to counsel the members of your flock, and point them to the hospice society door, when that need arises. A skillful Pastor can perform a tremendous good work as a competent “resource person” in the congregation, and community, able to HELP guide us through the rocky and treacherous passageways of life, while all the while reminding us that the ultimate end to our journey is safe harbor in the arms of the Lord.

A word about evangelism, and outreach. This past summer, an LCMS congregation in The Bronx, New York, held a VBS, and they had over 400 students enrolled. In fact, so many

unexpected children – children of a multitude of ethnicities – enrolled that they had to summon members of the New York City police department to come and patrol, and close off streets in the interests of public safety. On Staten Island, there is an LCMS congregation composed predominantly of African immigrants which routinely worships around 500 congregants per Sunday. If those congregations were to call pastors today, what would THEY be looking for? Would it be clergy named Kohlmeier from Linn, Kansas? Maybe. Would clergy named Kohlmeier from Linn, Kansas consider service in these congregations to be a “good fit” for THEIR talents, skills? A “good enough” fit to comfortably accept a call there with intentions of staying an indeterminate length of time? Maybe. But if the answer turns out to be “Maybe Not,” then – well, then we – the priesthood of ALL believers – had better continue to seek out the individuals who CAN comfortably serve these congregations. As German immigrants immigrated to the United States, our early church called out for German pastors to also emigrate from Germany, to come to serve the spiritual needs of the German communities here. Where will we find clergy to serve the needs of the other immigrant communities moving into our areas? Remember earlier when I mentioned that you get triple points for speaking Spanish? You get quadruple points if you can surface leadership in any ethnic community, and train those leaders for Christian outreach in that community.

I have been assured that this final point is not nearly as important as it may seem to me – that the seminaries diligently watch out for this issue, that the church hierarchy diligently watches over these matters – still it haunts me.

In a 1994 treatise on ministry entitled *Empowered in Grace: The Priesthood and the Pastoral Office*, Sam Nafziger points out, and I quote him, “Believers retain the responsibility to TEST and JUDGE what is being taught and preached.” In other words, it is YOUR responsibility as clergy, to Preach, Proclaim, Teach and otherwise “give us the good stuff – the good news of Salvation by Grace. And it is OUR collective responsibility as the “Royal Priesthood,” as the “visible church,” to monitor, to test, prove and be sure that what is preached and taught in our churches is indeed the good stuff - “Salvation by Grace, Alone.” But the question haunts me - Who will teach me how to APPROPRIATELY monitor, to test, to prove? Is this to be an “independent study” course, or an online “self-directed” course, or is this also an issue for which Laity should be looking to Clergy for occasional “in house” training and teaching and leadership? Not much at stake here – just the future generations of the church.

Are we as laity asking too much of our clergy? Of course we are. So give us “what you’ve got,” lead us with the skills you’ve learned and the talents you’ve been blessed with. And bring us with you, teach us out of your training, empower us with the WORD, delegate to us according to our abilities and training and talents and the needs YOU see in our congregations and communities. Help us “suit up” with the “whole armor of God,” for YOU have been called to this task, you have been called to your location, you have been selected and dedicated by God that TOGETHER, we serve, as the Royal Priesthood.

KDJ