

My Pastoral Rule

A Living Document by Rev. Russell A. Britton

*Inspired by and formed from the practice of ministry mentor, Rev. Dr. Scott K. Beebe of Mount of the Holy Cross Lutheran of Vail, Colorado. His can be considered at http://www.mountholy.com/my_pastoral_role_29.html

With the blessing of the call to Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church in Sequim, I set the resolve of my heart to be faithful and healthy in my service here. Part of that endeavor is most certainly being clear on the aligning values and vision one has for oneself through what we understand God to expect of us. Roy Disney said, "It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are." It is in the spirit of that desire that I engage in the exercise of regularly visiting this pastoral rule to faithfully and sustainably serve. Clearly the Christian life involves relationship and friendship with others. As a way of stewarding the relationships I inhabit as pastor, I share this document to let folks know what I am about as a pastor and what they can expect from me. Years of ministry experience confirm that we all carry in our heads some idea of what a pastor is or does or ought to do. I find that self-definition as a function of self-awareness is imperative if I am to stay centered in the myriad competing voices that would like to tell me who I am or should be. As such this document is to be characterized as "living" in the spirit of being open to dialogue about its formation **and** its forming affect. Its purpose is to help me remember in the midst of ministry, who I am, whose I am, and what is central to my vocation as a minister of the Gospel. As a sacred discipline, I intend to revisit this on an annual basis and ask myself: does this document continue to reflect who I am and what I understand myself to be as a minister of the Gospel? Should you wish to converse with me more about this please contact me at dvlcpastor@gmail.com

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(Last revision: August 2018)

To serve as a pastor in the ELCA and here at Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church is neither a privilege nor a right granted by the Church. It is a Call to an Office, ordained by God and administered by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. I understand both the function and role of the pastoral vocation to be defined by what Martin Luther called the seven notae ecclesiae (seven marks of the church):

- Proclamation of the Word (preaching);
- Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism;
- Administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion;
- Exercising the Office of the Keys (Confession and Absolution);
- Participation in the Ministerium;
- Leading worship in a Christian community; and
- Bearing witness to a Theology of the Cross as opposed to a Theology of Glory.

These are the marks and defining characteristics of what I understand to be central to the Pastoral Office. Attending to these tasks diligently readily makes for a full-time job. A pastor is called to preach, to pray, and to exercise, what was called in earlier times, the care of souls. Everything else is *adiaphora* meaning everything else is peripheral to these central tasks.

Scripture and the Means of Grace

I am convinced that we become and are shaped by what we attend to. If we attend to the things of God (Word, Sacrament, the means of grace), we become godly, gracious people. The Scriptures are both source and norm for our faith and life. Scripture is the underground stream that waters the life of faith and the life of the church. It is the wellspring out of which flows a ministry of vision and challenge. The Sacraments of water, bread and wine, nourish and sustain God's people keeping them centered in the life Jesus Christ poured out for the church and the world. A pastor who is no longer regularly studying, praying over, and teaching the Scriptures and participating in the Sacrament has abandoned the ministry. While there are many worthy activities that vie for a pastor's time and attention, I am persuaded that if I am to be faithful as a called servant of the church, I must attend, on a regular basis to both Word and Sacrament if I am to speak with truth and grace to the gathered assembly of God's people.

Faithful Service

I believe that the focus of my ministry is to be prayer, preaching, teaching, and careful, reflective listening. I am a servant of the Word of God. I am also a servant of the people of God. In order to accomplish this I believe that:

- + I serve most faithfully when I divide my time equally between (1) prayer and study as it relates to my own life and ministry and, (2) pastoral care of the congregation.
- + I serve most faithfully when I am diligent in my preparation of sermons and teaching.
- + I serve most faithfully when I focus on the forgiving, freeing, liberating Good News of Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

- + I serve most faithfully when I am thoroughly biblical and relevant in my preaching, teaching, and pastoral care.
- + I serve most faithfully when I participate in systematic reflection on my practice of ministry in the congregation I serve.
- + I serve most faithfully when I read and study for personal growth - not just material related to sermons and teaching.
- + I serve most faithfully when I remember that teaching precedes change. (e.g. our worship practices, liturgy, communion practices, etc.)
- + I serve most faithfully when I take Sabbath time for prayer, rest and reflection.
- + I serve most faithfully when I participate in lifelong learning as a divine mandate in order to water the wellsprings of creativity and vision.

Holy Living

In order to be a faithful servant of the Word and the people of God, I bind myself to these principles:

- A. I will do no harm.
- B. I will live with patient endurance; especially on those days when hurt, suffering, frustration and pain come unbidden, knowing that God gives strength to endure.
- C. With God's help I will love and respect the people I am called to serve, and be available to provide pastoral care, knowing that it is out of such care that the prophetic voice is spoken and, more importantly, heard.
- D. I will give diligence to the control of my tongue, attending to the sacredness of language. I will strive to keep my words from being cheapened through over inflation or demeaning speech. I will let my "yes" mean yes, and my "no" mean no.
- E. I will respect the personhood of all people by keeping intentional boundaries in relation to: sex, money, and the right to privacy.
- F. At all times I will honor the oath and seal of the Confessional.
- G. I will be a good steward of God's gifts to me and model that stewardship for the congregation I serve.

Among my colleagues in ministry I bind myself to these principles:

- A. I will value collegiality and mutual encouragement.
- B. I will avoid competition and the temptation to brag.
- C. I will avail myself of a confessor and I will be a confessor to others.

With regards to my own personhood, I bind myself to these principles:

- A. I will live a life of personal integrity.
- B. I will be true to myself and my convictions: if I become involved in something that is draining life out of me, I will evaluate its importance and the necessity of my involvement.
- C. I believe that faith is risky - such risk opens the door to the possibility of suffering, complexity, and even sin, but it also opens the door to joy, grace, and the discovery of God. If my primary value is "security" or being "right," then not much will come of my ministry.
- D. I will cultivate a quiet confidence in who God has called me to be.
- E. I will be open to correction and change.

- F. I will love myself enough to take time for relaxation and play, believing this to be an ethical mandate.
- G. I will celebrate life and its joys as well as endure suffering as Christ's servant.
- H. I will be pro-active in building and supporting nourishing friendships.
- I. I will view success only in terms of faithfulness to our Lord who called me to this ministry (not #'s, budget, or programs).
- J. I will keep alive the wonderment and surprise of the Gospel and God's transcendence and unconditional love for me and all others.
- K. I will speak the truth only in love, remembering that truth without love is brutality, and that love without truth is sentimentality.

I bind myself to God's centeredness:

- A. I will depend on God for life and redemption.
- B. I will remember that this is God's ministry - God was here long before I came. Therefore, I will see it as a gift to be honored and cherished.
- C. I will place this ministry and these people daily in God's hands.
- D. Soli Deo Gloria - to God belongs all the glory!

As said at the outset, self-reflection that results in vocational clarity is both good and necessary. Without it we easily forget who we are, where we've been, and where it is that, by God's grace, we hope to go.