

Shall we call them Lay Pastor?

THE QUESTION, "WHAT SHALL WE CALL THEM?" IS INEVITABLE WHEN A CHURCH IS IN THE PLANNING PHASE OF STARTING A LAY PASTORAL CARE MINISTRY. THIS MONOGRAPH WILL HELP A CHURCH FIND THE ANSWER THEY CAN LIVE WITH.

"A rose called by any other name still smells the same." This may be more true of a rose than it is of lay people who share in the pastoral care of God's people. What we call them is important for, as Juan Carlos Ortiz says, "If we don't have the right word is may be that we don't have the right idea." We must have the right idea about these ministering people because there is a direct relationship between how they see themselves and how they perform.

In Hope Presbyterian Church we call them Lay Pastors. Many churches call them Shepherds. Other titles I have come across in my travel and reading are: Caregivers, Lay Ministers, Care Coordinators, In-Touch Leader, Shepherd Helpers, Area Presbyters, Lay Pastoral Visitors, Flock Leaders, Parish Leaders, Care Shepherds.

I want to make a case for calling them Lay Pastors, these people of the pew who share in the care of God's people.

THEIR FUNCTION

If in designing a building, form follows function, in pastoral care the title follows function. What do we ask these Lay people to do? Better yet, what gifts has God given them and to what kind of ministry does he call them? What is their function?

We need a brief description of what we ask these people to do in caring for God's people. Try this: Caring for God's people is giving oneself in Christian love to a relationship in times of weakness and times of strength. These caring people have two things in common. **FIRST**—they each relate caringly to a bite-sized segment of the total congregation. **SECOND**—they are to 1) **Pray** for their people, 2) be **Available** in time of need, 3) make regular **Contacts**, and 4) be an **Example** (P A C E).

What do we expect the clergy pastors to do when we are talking about the pastoral care of individual members? The same things we expect of the Lay Pastors—the four things just listed. What gifts are required for both clergy and laity? The same: mercy, compassion, love, sensitivity, acceptance, patience.

Do all clergy have these pastoral gifts? No. I heard one church officer say of his pastor, "He loves the Lord but he doesn't seem to love people," Do all lay people have these gifts? No. Those who do have them received them from God and should be the ones who share in caring for His people.

Since by pastoring we mean caring for God's people, lay people who share in caring for God's people should be called pastors – Lay Pastors.

In my book, *Can The Pastor Do It Alone?*, in the section titled, "Lay People are Pastoring", I wrote, "... if commissioned lay people love like pastors, care like pastors, visit like pastors, have pastoring gifts like pastors and pastor like pastors, they are pastors" (pg. 15) If a pastor called by any other name is still a pastor then why not use the designation "pastor?"

THEIR IDENTITY

QUESTION: What kind of call does it take for lay people to be caring for God's people?

ANSWER: The same kind of call it takes for a clergy pastor, a call from God. Then, an opportunity to test the call.

QUESTION: How does this call reach lay people?

ANSWER: The same way it reaches the clergy, ranging all the way from a vision and a voice, to a suggestion by some interested person who has spotted the gifts in him or her, to a faint interest becoming a calculated decision.

In the early church, people who showed signs of maturity and wisdom were appointed or chosen to be elders. Paul on one occasion called the elders of the Ephesians church together and charged them "to care for God's people" (Acts 20:28). Peter charged the elders addressed in his letter to "tend the flock of God" (I Peter 5:2). Jesus had previously charged him to "take care of my sheep" (John 21:17).

In other words, people with pastoral gifts were chosen to use those gifts in the pastoral care of the others. The "others" had different gifts such as administration, teaching, helping, etc. These "others" were to use their gifts in appropriate ways. Those with pastoring gifts were to use them in pastoring. The Spirit is the one who determines who gets which fits. We try to discover our gifts and help others discover theirs and mutually encourage one another

in using them. I am building a case for calling those who care for God's people *Lay Pastors*. I am not talking about identifying those who should pastor. They are not the apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers of Ephesians 4:11. They are the saints of Ephesians 4:12, the laity who are to be equipped by the apostles and others. The evangelist of 4:11 are to equip some of the saints of 4:12 to evangelize. The teachers of 4:11 are to equip od the saints of 4:12 to teach. Not get it, the pastors of 4:11 are to equip some of the saints of 4:12 to pastor the saints to whom the Spirit of God has given pastoring gifts.

So far we have seen that the function of these "saints" is to care for God's people -- "tend the flock of God." If clergy who care for God's people are called pastors, then lay people who are gifted, called and set apart to care for God's people most certainly can be called pastors -- Lay Pastors.

THEIR TITLE

Looking at four English words in the Greek will help us decide what we shall call these people of the pew who are gifted, called and apart to pastorally care for God's people. The four words: (1) *Pastor* (Eph. 4:11), (2) *Tend* (John 21:17 and Acts 20:28), (3) *Saints* (Ephesians 4:12), and (4) *Chief Shepherd* (I Peter 5:4).

PASTOR (Poimane') means a herdsman, a shepherd. Although this Greek word appears many times in the New Testament, only in Ephesians 4:11 is it translated "pastor." Please note that **Pastor** is the most common word used in the American church to designate he clergy, other words being Reverend and Minister. The seven years I was pastor of Haili Church in Hilo, Hawaii, I was called "Kahu," which, literally translated from the Hawaiians, is "Shepherd." I have been referred to as a shepherd in other churches I have pastored, but never called "Shepherd." While pastoring Randolph Heights Presbyterian Church in St. Paul , Minnesota I was called "Pastor Mel" by everyone. I liked it.

TEND (Poimai'no) is the verb form of the noun poimane'. It means to feed, to tend, to keep sheep, to furnish pastorage of food, to nourish. In Acts 20:28 this one Greek word is translated differently in three translations. "Feed" –

KJV; "care for" – RSV, and "be shepherds" – NIV. I I Peter 5:2 Poimai'no is also translated three ways: "feed" – KJV; "tend" – RSV, and "be shepherds" – KJV.

If our definitions of pastor (Poimane) is one who tends or cares for the people of God, the word can be applied to both clergy and laity who are gifted, called and set aside for this ministry. God has done the gifting and calling. The church acknowledges God's work by setting the person aside with the laying on hands or some other meaningful act.

It seems that we will need to downgrade our understanding of what God has gifted and called this person to do by using a term meaning less than pastor, or upgrade the person to match the divine gifting and calling by using the term pastor. Do we dare think of the ministry of this person in terms less than God has intended by using a designation less than pastor? Is it not better to think of the ministry as God thinks of it and bring lay people up to that level. We do this by teaching the Biblical truth about preparing God's people to give pastoral care. Let's demonstrate publicly that we have the right idea by using the right word.

SAINT (Hag'ios) means a person whose services God employs: one set apart to be, as it were, exclusively his. Just as the Israelite knew they were selected by God to be his, Christians are to know they are selected by him to be his. Psalm 4:3 is true of every Christian: "But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself."

This Greek word *hag'ios* in Ephesians 4:12, designated those set apart by God to do his ministry, is translated "saint" in KJV and RSV. The NIV translate it "God's people." The elders referred to in Acts 20:28, who were to "care for the church of God" (RSV), and the elders addressed by Peter in I Peter 5:1 who were to "tend the flock of God," (RSV) were most certainly saints, hag'ios, who were gifted, called and set apart to give pastoral care

According to Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12, Christians (hag'ios) are given gifts for a variety of ministries. Those given the gift of mercy have the basic pastoral gift. We can believe that there is a sufficient number of people in every church given the necessary pastoral gifts to care for the congregation. The clergy pastor is to equip these lay pastors for their ministry. Let's call them what they are. Lay Pastors.

CHIEF SHEPHERD (Archepoi'mane) means Chief Shepherd (I Peter:5:4). The only Chief Shepherd is Jesus Christ! The local salaried and ordained pastor is neither the Chief Shepherd nor the only person to be doing the pastoring. According to Ephesians 4:11–12 the major pastoral role of the clergy pastor (undershepherd) is to equip the saints for their ministry. So, Let's call those who have been equipped Lay Pastors.

Why "Lay"? Think of it this way, not using the technical language of the Greek but using the terminology we are accustomed to using: There are vocational pastors and volunteer pastors. Period! Both are given pastoral gifts by God. The vocational pastor is to equip the pastorally gifted people. The volunteer pastor is to be equipped so as to do the pastoring.

CONCLUSION

Does a rose called by any other name still smell the same? Of course. Does a person gifted, called and equipped for pastoring still do the same if called by some other name? Maybe. Maybe not. Other terms may be O'K if the persons know what God has called them to be and do. However, if they don't have the right word, it may be they will not have the right idea. If they don't have the right idea it may be they will not do the right thing. Have I made my case? If not, be sure your "roses" are really "roses" so that if they are called by some other name they will still "smell the same."