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A Pastoral Rule For Today

An Interview

Pastors in America today are being asked to fulfill more roles than ever. In addition to preaching, teaching, and providing pastoral care, they are often expected to be business administrators, personnel directors, conflict managers, CEOs, entrepreneurs, visionary leaders, professional therapists, personal coaches, community organizers, social reformers, etc. Pulled in so many directions, many pastors (despite outward smiles) are often tired, confused, and frustrated, and so are many in their congregations. What can be done? John Burgess, Jerry Andrews, and Joseph Small, recently published, A Pastoral Rule For Today: Reviving an Ancient Practice *(Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), that seeks to address this question. Examining the lives of Augustine, Benedict, Gregory the Great, John Calvin, John Wesley, John Henry Newman, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the book proposes a contemporary "pattern for ministry that both encourages pastors and enables them to focus on what is most important in their pastoral task." Managing Editor of* Theology Matters*, Richard Burnett, recently interviewed the authors to find out what motivated them to write this book and how it might make a difference.*

TM: How did the idea for this book come about?"

Jerry: A brief *Pastoral Rule* was published by The Office of Theology and Worship (PCUSA) which outlined our hopes and made our suggestions for pastors pulled every way but up. It was received well and spread far. We thought we might be done. One day on a three-way conference call to consider if more would be needed and helpful, John asked us to read the Presbyterian Panel's most recent poll. It reported that only 32% of pastors surveyed said (admitted?) they read the Bible at least weekly for non-instrumental purposes (sermon preparation, etc.). Joe said, "No wonder." I asked what he meant. Joe said, "Jerry, since I've known you, you've maintained that we give every evidence of being an uncatechized communion. But Jerry, they're not reading their Bibles even." Alas, more was needed. So, a larger project was imagined to inform and inspire pastors to a greater faithfulness and fruitfulness. John took the lead.

John: The idea for the book came out of several years of discussion among Jerry, Joe, me, and other colleagues in the PCUSA. We see that minsters face many competing demands on their time and energies. They are expected to be organizers and administrators, counselors and personnel managers, compelling teachers and charismatic preachers, and many other things—and to do it all with a sense of humor! How in a society (and sometimes a church) that would like to reduce them to dispensers of "services" to religious "consumers" can they stay grounded in the core of their vocation: to witness in every life situation to God's work in and through Jesus Christ? We have come to see the wisdom in defining basic rhythms and patterns of the Christian life that help pastors keep first things first—and we call these rhythms and patterns "a pastoral rule."

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Joe: I was a pastor in two different churches in the 1970s and 80s. I was painfully aware of multiple, often conflicting demands on my time and effort. It became clear to me that without a plan for study and prayer I would be reduced to merely responding to the priorities of others. I needed disciplines that would nurture my sense of vocation. I developed a rudimentary pattern of prayer, Scripture, and study that was often difficult to maintain. When I began to work in the Office of Theology and Worship, I committed the largest share of available resources to helping pastors nurture a deeply spiritual-theological vocational core that would deepen their capacity to proclaim the gospel in preaching, teaching, and mission (e.g. Pastor Theologian Consultations, Company of Pastors, ReForming Ministry, Excellence from the Start/Company of New Pastors, theology conferences, etc.). "A Pastoral Rule for Today" grew out of several Theology and Worship initiatives that aimed to be useful to pastors and their congregations.

TM: Many church folk, perhaps even some readers of *Theology Matters*, may be surprised to hear that so many pastors today are so inattentive to practices that were once considered central to their vocation, namely, focus on prayer, Scripture, and study. Can you explain, briefly, why these practices are no longer so central for so many pastors today?

John: Pastors do give time to prayer, Scripture, and study. But often they do so to fulfill their professional duties to others. They pray and read Scripture at hospital bedsides, and study to prepare sermons and Sunday School lessons. And then they are tempted to conclude, that's enough, now I have other things to do. But what can get lost is listening for God's living Word for them personally. I am a seminary professor, not a pastor, but I know how easy it is for me too to ignore these basic spiritual practices because I am so busy helping others. Nevertheless, deep down I know that what my students need is not only my academic knowledge but the witness of my life. Do they see that I am seeking daily to be fed in my own faith by prayer, Scripture, and theological study?

Jerry: I think the practices of the vocation and even of broad discipleship have not been modeled for a couple of generations and, like much of what was once valued but is not now current, it simply fell into disuse by neglect and silence. Giving account of these practices, no matter how 'personal,' was once public. It's been a long time since I've been in a conversation with another pastor in which we gave each other the blessing of the knowledge of each other's Bible reading and prayers.

Joe: The institutionalization of the church has placed a premium on ecclesial "success." Personal characteristics and managerial/entrepreneurial techniques are employed to bolster church programs, membership, and budgets. Pastoral effectiveness is judged by performance in markers of institutional well-being. Time spent with Scripture, prayer, and disciplined reading is invisible to the congregation, and is only tangentially related to institutional advancement. So, with multiple demands placed on pastors, the easiest things to let slide are those with "private" activity and marginal institutional payoff.

TM: Forms of institutionalization, professionalization, careerism, etc., of course, have been with the church practically from the start. Is it different today?

John: What is different about our time is that pastors easily lose a sense of what is at the core of their calling. Yes, institutional pressures and realities have always been there, but past ages have valued pastors for their spiritual, theological wisdom and leadership, whereas today many people judge pastors almost exclusively in terms of secular definitions of organizational success. A pastor grounded in disciplines of prayer, Scripture reading, and theological reflection will develop a capacity to keep first things first.

TM: I've heard it said that Christianity in Palestine was a relationship. In Greece it became an idea. In Rome it became an institution. And in America it became an *enterprise*. Do you think there is anything exceptional about the challenges pastors in America are facing today?

Joe: The short answer is "yes." America has always been the site of multiple denominations, all caught up in forms of competition. But denominational loyalty was once commonplace. Presbyterians supported Presbyterian missions, used Presbyterian educational resources and hymnals, married Presbyterians, and bred more Presbyterians. It was the same with other denominations. But denominational loyalty is now a mere memory. So, competition is more overt and pressures on the CEO/entrepreneur/marketer are more intense, and all in an era of declining interest in the religious goods and services on offer by denominations and their congregations.

Jerry: I am not aware of the expectational pressures on pastors in times past but to say that now the ever growing strength of the congregation far outweighs any sense of the holiness of the pastor. Richard Baxter's claim, "The greatest gift I can give my congregation is my personal holiness," is foreign to us.

TM: Eugene Peterson wrote more than thirty years ago, "The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, … They are preoccupied with shopkeeper's concerns—how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the

customers will lay out more money." You, by contrast, are upholding a more traditional understanding of what it means to be a pastor. Do you see any signs that Christians in America might be growing tired of having shopkeepers for pastors and want the sort of pastors you are commending?

Joe: Maybe. Many of those who are tired of shopkeepers simply don't go to the shop anymore. Those who remain may desire deeper nurture in the Faith, in prayer, in discipleship, and in mission. Our book is an attempt to help pastors deepen their own faith, prayer, discipleship, and mission, thus being better able to nurture the best longings of congregations.

John: Not long ago I told a group of seminary students about my family's efforts to observe a practice of daily prayer when my children were still small. One of the students asked, "How could I do that with my kids?" He thought it was a great idea, but he had no clue how to organize it. I think that's sometimes the situation in our congregations. People can get fascinated with these basic spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith, but they really aren't sure that they know how to pray, how to read the Bible. Pastors who are practicing these disciplines know the joys, challenges, and possible pitfalls of keeping them and can offer practical guidance. In my family we had a Bible reading and a prayer around the kitchen table at breakfast. Sometimes the juice was spilled or a child was upset, but we didn't worry about that. We did the best we could. Pastors can help church members find what can work for them.

Jerry: The wise traveler puts the oxygen mask on herself first, then is able to help others.

TM: Yet some pastors may be reluctant to practice these disciplines for fear of appearing too spiritual, monastic, bookish, detached, other-worldly, or 'so heavenly-minded that they're no earthly good.' After all, some pastors get more points from their congregations for mowing the church lawn or showing up at a soup kitchen than for studying the Bible or serious theology, even though mowing the lawn or showing up at a soup kitchen is so much easier. What would you tell pastors who entertain such fears?

Joe: I would tell them that they are responsible to the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit before they are responsible to the expectations of the congregation.

John: As important and necessary as mowing the lawn is, it is not at the heart of a pastor's vocation. The one thing that a pastor must do is to tell the truth about God. And a pastor can tell the truth about God only if a pastor is seeking to know God—and not just as an object of intellectual study but as a living presence. Thank goodness for resources of prayer, Scripture reading, and theological reflection that invite pastors into living relationship with this God, so that they may speak rightly about God.

Jerry: I would tell them to teach the congregation. The three I've served all made progress in understanding the value of my spiritual and relational growth and deepening. They also wanted this to benefit them—that was the promise. I needed to show that benefit. So, in short, I would say, use the time well and for their sake. This is not self-centered.

TM: Given that there are pastors who do not use their time well or their studies to the benefit of the congregation, what would you tell congregational leaders who want to support their pastors in living out the disciplines you describe?

Jerry: This is tough. But there are real elders out there who can be persuaded that for the sake of the wellbeing of their congregation the pastor needs to become a fully formed teaching elder. And then give them time, space, accountability for it. My first church was small and rural. They trusted me for this and were at least understanding and tolerant. My second church was very well educated and filled with Wheaton faculty. They were encouraging. My third church expected it and expresses appreciation for it. Congregational leaders who attempt to persuade a pastor of this need to promise and keep the promise that if they want intentional formation as a first priority then they cannot later make church growth the basis of evaluation.

Joe: This is a question that needs an extensive answer. But for now: pastors should develop a rule, then spend time with the session explaining the rule and why it is needed. Then ask the elders what they might add or modify. Finally ask for the session's endorsement and promise regular check-ups. I also recommend that pastors ask the session to commit to a time of study and prayer within each session meeting (more than an opening "devotional"). The session might then report all of this to the congregation.

John: A session could commit itself to practicing a rule of life together. As Joe says, that could include committed prayer and study at each session meeting. It could also include a rule of daily prayer in which each member of the session lifts up, each day, every other member of the session, including the pastor. What pastors so often need (actually, what every Christian needs) is a person or group that both gives encouragement and calls for accountability in living a more holy life. How could a session model for the whole congregation a way of life together grounded in prayer,

Scripture reading, and theological reflection? And could such a rule give pastors the space—and stimulus—to exercise their core vocation, namely, to be pastor-theologians and spiritual leaders?

TM: Perhaps many have simply not considered seriously enough the benefits or blessings of such a life. Granted, they are not a consequence of works, any calculation, or quid pro quo. Rather they are a matter of grace, which means they are always beyond our control. But what would you say about the fruit of such disciplines or the potential blessings of such practices?

Joe: It is all too easy for pastors to forget that they are shepherds/leaders secondarily. They are disciples/ learners first. Disciple = disciplined life. The blessing of a disciplined life is being drawn ever deeper into union with Christ.

Jerry: The blessing is knowing God, having some humble sense of being a fit tool in God's hand for the work God is doing, of knowing by these ordinary means that the Spirit is forming us more and more into the image of Christ.

John: The fruits and benefits of such disciplines are not always obvious. But they provide daily spiritual nourishment that sustains ministry for the long haul. The words of the Scots Confession concerning the Lord's Supper are equally applicable to disciplines of prayer, Scripture reading, and theological reflection: "Although the faithful, hindered by negligence and human weakness, do not profit as much as they ought in the actual moment . . . yet afterwards [each discipline] shall bring forth fruit, being living seed sown in good ground; for the Holy Spirit . . . will not deprive the faithful of the fruit of that mystical action" (chapter XXI).

TM: Friends, thank you for extolling these disciplines and also for practicing them. Your lives, your work, and your witness have been a blessing to many.

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"All The Ministers Shall Meet Together"

by Joseph D. Small

When Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on true repentance at the Wittenberg Castle church in 1517, John Calvin was an eight-year-old French schoolboy. He was first introduced to the Reform movement sparked by Luther during his university studies at Paris and Orléans, eventually leading to what he called a "sudden conversion" to the Reformation movement. Calvin's active commitment to the cause of the é*vangélique*s made life in Catholic France risky, necessitating periodic withdrawals to the Swiss cities of Basel and Strasbourg.

Three crucial events in 1536 shaped the future of Reformed Protestantism. First, John Calvin published a small, pocket-sized book, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* which he would revise and expand in subsequent Latin and French editions in 1539, 1543, 1550, and 1559. Second, a public assembly of the citizens of Geneva voted in May to "live henceforth according to the law of the gospel and the word of God, and to abolish all papal abuses." Finally, in August, John Calvin arrived in Geneva, intending to stay the night before continuing his journey to Strasbourg.

Calvin's little *Institut*es had not received wide recognition, but it was known to Guillaume Farel; the leading Reformer in Geneva, who prevailed on Calvin to remain in the city to help consolidate the new religious situation. Consolidation was an urgent necessity, for the citizens of Geneva had rejected the Catholic Church without affirming anything definite. Living according to the gospel and the Word of God required a new form of church, but all Geneva had was a reform-minded void.

In this novel situation, the city council assumed ecclesiastical as well as civil authority. It was the council, not Farel and certainly not Calvin, that controlled the religious affairs of Geneva. It soon became apparent that the council was not amenable to many of Calvin's proposals for reforming the church, and it further asserted its right to shape ecclesial life.

Calvin's forceful counterassertions that the church, not the civil government, had jurisdiction over sacramental practice, church discipline, and ministerial appointments led the council to expel Calvin and Farel in the spring of 1538. Calvin's three-year exile in Strasbourg, where he became pastor of the French-speaking Reformed congregation, deepened his views on church reform and enhanced his reputation. Geneva invited him back to stay in 1541.

Calvin was a second-generation Reformer, an inheritor of the Reformation's central theological trajectories. Among the remaining tasks, however, was the shaping of Christian communities that would be capable of ensuring the proclamation of re-formed faith and the nurturing of re-formed faithfulness. Thus, the nature and purpose of the church and its ordered ministries endured as a central concern throughout Calvin's life. The church was central in all his writing, and the task of giving new shape to the life of the church was central to his labors in Geneva.

The nature and purpose of the church and its ministries is an issue in every time and place. What do we mean by the word *church*? Everyday speech gives voice to a jumble of meanings tumbling over one another: buildings, people, congregations, organizations, judicatories, denominations, world communions, all Christians everywhere, and more, all with variations that further complicate the sense of *church. W*hat we mean by *churc*h is more than a matter of vocabulary, for the church is central in the reception, preservation, and transmission of Christian faith and faithfulness. Following Cyprian and Augustine, John Calvin spoke of the church as "the common mother of the godly": "There is no other way to enter into life," said Calvin, "unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance … until we have been pupils all our lives."[1]

What do we mean by *church*? Answering this is the work of ecclesiology—the doctrine of the church which is not confined to academic theologians or ecumenical enthusiasts. Understanding the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the church is a critical, often-neglected practical theological task of pastors, who bear significant responsibility for shaping patterns of congregational faith and life. While most pastors labor to develop congregational faith and mission, the basic given-ness of the church is simply assumed. Pastors may assess its spiritual health, appraise its missional fidelity, and evaluate its management, but what "it" is remains elusive.

Pastoral attention that focuses simply on improving what is becomes vulnerable to religious market forces, catering to real or imagined needs. Needed in every age is serious, sustained attention to the fundamental nature and purpose of the people of God in the world. Similarly, apart from an understanding of the church's character and intention, members will be set adrift to engage in comparison shopping, measuring churches by their capacity to provide appealing and satisfying religious goods and services. Understanding what the church is and what it is intended to be is not only an academic but a spiritual matter for all Christians.

In our time of ecclesial disarray, marked by denominational divisions and cultural disestablishment, it may be worthwhile to give renewed attention to Calvin's reform of the church's character and structure, especially to his formation and cultivation of the church's m*inistrie*s. Calvin's understanding of the pastor's vocation cannot be appreciated apart from his conviction that pastoral ministry within the congregation is to be lived in collaboration with two other ordered ministries-elders and deacons within the ministry of the whole people of God. Furthermore, Calvin believed that pastoral ministry is to be lived within relationships of mutual responsibility and accountability among pastors.

Calvin did not write a formal pastoral rule. Nevertheless, the elements of his hopes and expectations for pastors are evident throughout his writings and in the practices of the church in Geneva. Calvin's pastoral "rule" is best appreciated within his understanding of the faith and life of the whole people of God. The starting point, then, is his conviction that Word and sacrament are the core of the church's life, followed by his insight into the unified plural ministry of the church, and concluding with his rule for pastoral ministry.

A Church of the Word and Sacrament

The sixteenth-century Swiss Reformation's distinct approach to the nature and purpose of the church began with Christ, not with the church itself.[2] According to the Ten Theses of Berne (1528), an early Reformed confession of faith, "The holy Christian Church, whose only head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, and abides in the same, and listens not to the voice of a stranger:"[3] For Calvin, the church's meaning begins with Jesus Christ, revealed to us in Scripture. As a creation of the Word, the church comes into being continuously through the real presence of the living Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

How do we know this creature of the Word when we see it? Together with Luther, Calvin said that the church becomes visible through the Word and sacrament—preaching and teaching, baptism and Eucharist: "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to

Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."[4] The right proclamation and hearing of God's Word and the faithful celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper are clear indicators of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Although churches engage in many other forms of ministry and mission, Calvin was convinced that at the heart of it all, shaping and animating everything else, must be God's living and present Word in the means of grace.

Calvin's two marks of the church center on lived faith within congregations. He validates a church's fidelity not by its orthodox doctrine or its sacramental theology, much less by its ecclesiastical structures, but by the presence of faithful proclamation, reception, and sacramental life. His marks of the church point us to congregations, not academies; to assemblies of people, not libraries; to worship, not books. For Calvin, doctrinal purity and sacramental precision are subordinate to our fundamental ecclesial faithfulness that allows the gospel to be received, believed, and lived by ordinary men and women. Proclamation and sacraments are more than liturgical activities and certainly more than the memory of a long ago and faraway Jesus; they are the primary means of uniting with Christ.

In Calvin's understanding, Word and sacrament share precisely the same function: they are the clearest means by which the risen, living Lord reveals himself to us. "Therefore, let it be regarded as a settled principle," says Calvin, "that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."[5] In baptism, Eucharist, and Scripture preaching and teaching, "it is therefore certain that the Lord offers us mercy and the pledge of his grace both in his Sacred Word and in his sacraments."[6] Word and sacrament are identifiers of the church because they are the action of Christ for us in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church flourishes when the living Word of God—preached, taught, heard, seen, felt, tasted—is unconstrained. Conversely, when the means of grace are suppressed, distorted, veiled, or marginalized, the church is deformed, even if its ordered structures endure.

We should not imagine that in marking the church by Word and sacrament Calvin was thinking only of the church's worship—the Sunday sermon, the baptism of an infant, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Proclamation of the Word includes multiple forms of teaching and study: studying the Bible, reciting catechisms, singing psalms, and learning the church's creeds, commandments, and prayers "by heart" are all instances of the Word's daily presence in the body of believers. Perhaps most significantly, Calvin added two little words, "and heard," to the pure preaching of the Word, making explicit his intention that all forms of proclamation should be received and lived by God's people. Proclaiming the Word leads to living the Word, and both together are a mark of ecclesial faithfulness.

Similarly, baptism and Eucharist encompass patterns of life beyond the church's walls. The Calvin-inspired confession of the French Reformed churches declares that "In Baptism we are grafted into the body of Christ, washed and cleansed by his blood, and renewed in holiness of life by his Spirit. Although we are baptized only once, the benefit it signifies lasts through life and death."[7] Correspondingly, the confession declares that "the holy Supper of the Lord is a testimony of our unity with Jesus Christ. He died only once and was raised for our sake, yet we are truly fed and nourished by his flesh and blood. Thus, we are made one with him and his life is communicated to us."[8] The sacraments' power to unite us to Christ extends beyond the moment of their administration and into our continuing sanctification.

More than mere nostalgia for Reformation clarity, the application of Word and sacraments provides the twenty-first-century church with foundational identifyers of ecclesial faithfulness. Each congregation (and denomination) should ask whether Word and sacrament are found at the heart of its common life. Other church activities are important, of course, but they must not bury these means of grace or push them to the periphery. Furthermore, the whole range of church programs must remain subject to authentication by Word and sacrament, for these crucial realities are the embodiment of the gospel of Christ in the life of his people. For Calvin, and for us, Word and sacrament stand as the controlling core and marks of the church's true life.

Unified Plural Ministry

Churches of the Word and sacrament do not happen automatically, nor is their continuing faithfulness assured.[9] Calvin was clear that the necessary, continual reform of the church is based on the three pillars of "doctrine," "administering the sacraments," and "governing the church."[10] It is important to note that Calvin employs *doctrine* and *preaching* interchangeably. He understands doctrine not as a set of abstract formulations but as truth best known in faithful proclamation, which is why he was also clear that ministry—the pastoral office—is essential to the revival and maintenance of the church's faithful theology, worship, and order. "Neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life," Calvin asserted, "as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth."[11]

Calvin and other sixteenth-century Reformers held pastoral ministry in high regard because they were convinced that the church's fidelity to the gospel

depends on proclamation of the Word in preaching, teaching, and sacramental life; on worship that glorifies God; and on church order that honors the Spirit's leading. By virtue of its vocation to proclaim the Word and teach the faith, the ministerial office was "the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body."[12]

Therefore, the foundational elements in Calvin's pastoral rule emerge from the centrality of Word and sacrament. First, pastors must engage in continual study of Scripture and the faith of the church so that they are equipped to preach and teach the gospel with integrity. Study is not preparation for ministry, it is central to ministry itself. Second, pastors must celebrate the sacraments with theological integrity and pastoral sensitivity so that the presence of Christ is perceived, received, and lived by the congregation. Third, pastors must ensure that Word and sacrament live beyond the Lord's Day worship, animating the church's other ministries and missions.

As essential as pastors are to ministry, Calvin does not confine his understanding of the church to this office alone. His reading of the New Testament led him to commend four offices of ministry: pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons. Rather than thinking of these ministries as a differentiated quadrilateral, Calvin understood them as plural offices within two ecclesial functions: ministries of the Word performed by presbyters (pastor-teachers and elders) and ministries of service performed by deacons (caring directly for refugees, the poor, sick, and dispossessed). He further held that these presbyterial and diaconal ministries are plural expressions of the church's one undivided ministry.

Calvin's distinctive approach to the church's ordered ministries is clearly seen in his transformation of the office of deacon. The Catholic Church's deacons were future priests, distinct from the laity. In the emerging Lutheran churches, deacons were now laity—usually civil servants—charged with care for the poor. But for Geneva's Reformed ecclesiology and practice, deacons were church members who held ecclesiastical office as an essential component of the church's ministry. Although all Christians share diaconal responsibilities, Calvin charged ordered deacons with leading the whole church in works of mercy and justice. They were no longer a subset of another order of ministry, nor were they removed from the church's orders of ministry. Instead, they held dual vocations—secular and ecclesial. Deacons were church members called and ordained as one of the "orders of office instituted by our Lord for the government of his Church."[13]

Calvin's understanding of the deacon reflects two key features of his approach—to the church's ordered ministries. First, he resisted clericalism and constructed a pattern of ministry that breaks down the distinction between clergy and laity by instituting two so-called lay ecclesial ministries--deacon and elder. Second, the church's various ministries are corporate, both within and among the orders. No person or order of ministry can function apart from its essential relationship to other orders. For instance, the corporate character of Calvin's orders of ministry is evident in the exercise of ecclesial discipline. Pastors are called "to proclaim the Word of God, to instruct, admonish, exhort and censure, both in public and in private, to administer the sacraments and to enjoin brotherly correction *along* w*ith the elders and colleagues*."[14] Discipline—a combination of church governance and pastoral care—is a corporate responsibility shared within a council of pastors and elders.

Calvin's plurality of ministries seeks to break open the ministry of the whole people of God. His ordering of ministry in the church gives visible form to the "priesthood of all believers" while protecting the church against the potential abuses of clericalism. Distinctions between clergy and laity are so deliberately broken down that these very terms are ill-suited to Calvin's ecclesiology. All ordered ministries are exercised in, with, and for the whole church, and all are bound together in the common task of ensuring the church's fidelity to the Word. Furthermore, the church's ministries remain undivided. Any ministerial act performed by a pastor, elder, or deacon is done on behalf of the whole ministry; no one may act independently as the representative of Christ.

Contemporary Reformed and Presbyterian churches retain the form of Calvin's unified plural ministry, although not always its substance. While other ecclesial traditions embody different forms of ordered ministry, Calvin's insight of pastoral ministry as a shared vocation is directly relevant to the life and work of all pastors, whatever their church's polity. Today, in far too many congregations, pastors act as CEOs of an organization, working to rationalize mission, enhance efficiency, and increase market share. Elected congregational councils act as a board of directors that reviews and approves management's programs and strategy and monitors financial and property assets. Diaconal ministries are often confined to personal services within the congregation.

Calvin's understanding of the shape of pastoral ministry assumes that pastors are never unaccompanied in their calling. Whatever the specific shape of a church's governance, Calvin's vision presupposes that pastoral ministry is lived out in deep, abiding companionship with others. Partnership within the congregation means far more than an obligatory bow to "the ministry of the laity." Rather, Calvin's pastoral rule insists that ministry

takes place among those whom a congregation has called to specific forms of service, whether administrative, educational, liturgical, or missional.

Calvin's vision also assumes that each pastor will live out ministry in deep, abiding companionship with neighboring pastors, which means far more than common service in a judicatory. Rather, ministry is to be lived within a shared vocation marked by regular study, prayer, mutual accountability, and common mission. Both within and beyond the congregation, all are to act as "good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:10). Their mutual calling is to proclaim clearly the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, nurturing congregational fidelity to God's new Way in the world. Calvin's pastoral rule requires that ministry be lived collegially with other pastors as a demonstration of the church's unity.

The Geneva Consistory and the Company of Pastors

Restored unity of the whole church was beyond Calvin's reach, and the Reformation churches themselves were embroiled in divisive doctrinal disputes. It was possible, however, to ensure the unity of the Geneva churches. Calvin understood that "some form of organization is necessary in all human society to foster the common peace and maintain concord." He went on to say that "this ought especially to be observed in churches, which are best sustained when all things are under a well-ordered constitution, and which without concord become not churches at all."[15] Thus, the organization of the church in Geneva included ecclesiastical ordinances, provision for the visitation of church, a common catechism, liturgy, the Psalter, the Geneva Academy, and two quite remarkable institutions, the Geneva Consistory and the Venerable Company of Pastors. Both the consistory and the Company of Pastors are corporate embodiments of Calvin's pastoral rule. Their shape was set out by Calvin in his ecclesiastical ordinances of 1541.

The Geneva Consistory

The Geneva Consistory was composed of twelve elders together with the pastors of Geneva and the surrounding villages (beginning with nine and growing over the years to nineteen). It was responsible for church order and discipline. The consistory's composition freed church affairs from exclusive control by pastors, and it progressively liberated the church from the jurisdiction of the magistracy.

*Communit*y *governan*ce. "The elders are to assemble once a week with the ministers, that is to say on Thursday morning, to see that there be no disorder in the Church and to discuss together remedies as they are required." [16]

Popular mythology portrays Calvin as "the dictator of Geneva" who instituted a "reign of terror," policing every aspect of civil and personal life. This characterization has been debunked repeatedly, but it persists, nevertheless. Actually, throughout Calvin's service in Geneva, church discipline—a combination of governance and pastoral care—was the responsibility of the pastors and elders together, meeting weekly as a council. Recent publication of the consistory minutes shows that the body dealt sensitively with most matters coming before it.[17] The pastors and elders devoted much of their time to family disputes, mistreatment of wives by their husbands, public flouting of civic and ecclesial authority, marital infidelity, and family disputes over inheritance.

The consistory was composed of elders and ministers from the three churches within Geneva proper. Other churches were scattered in small country villages throughout greater Geneva. Each of the country churches was visited annually to inquire into the well-being of the congregation and the fidelity of the minister. Among the matters explored in the visitation was attendance at worship and whether the people "found profit in it for Christian living."[18] The people of the church were asked "whether the Minister preaches edifyingly, or whether there be anything … unfitting to the instruction of the people because it is obscure, or treats of superfluous questions, or exercises too great rigor."[19] The purpose of the visitation was to affirm evidence of fidelity and to remedy any defects in faith and life.

The consistory's aim was not punishment but rather resolving conflicts, reconciling disputants, and strengthening personal and congregational faith and faithfulness. When punishment was levied, always as a last resort, it was most often exclusion from the Lord's Table until repentance and restoration were accomplished. Historian Robert Kingdon's detailed review of the consistory's minutes led him to conclude that the body "reflected a real concern for other people. ... There were many signs of real caring, of a desire to help those in need of help in resolving their personal problems, including their most intimate family problems. To a degree, then, the consistory of Geneva incorporated a real Christian concern, a desire to help one's neighbor."[20]

The Geneva Consistory gave substance to Calvin's conviction that ministering to the people of God is not the sole preserve of clergy and that a functional renewal of clergy-laity partnership in pastoral care is an essential component of faithful church life. Collaboration took form in council, which exercised governance and pastoral care for persons, pastors, and congregations. In many con temporary American congregations, church

councils (sessions, vestries, etc.) function as management committees, focusing primarily on budgetary and facility issues. Similarly, judicatories (dioceses, presbyteries, conferences, etc.) tend to deal with organizational, administrative, and business matters. Both congregational councils and judicatories shy away from addressing personal, family, and group beliefs and behaviors, showing more concern for individual rights of privacy than for personal faith and faithfulness.

Calvin understood that reformation of church life is not the right or responsibility of pastors alone. They are not the rescuers of ailing congregations, the renewers of moribund churches, the entrepreneurial managers of thriving congregations, or the sole providers of pastoral care. Calvin's vision of governance entailed shared responsibility for the spiritual health of congregations and their members. His concerns could be ours as well: What is the condition of Word and sacrament in the church? What is the relationship of other church programs and activities to Word and sacrament? Is Christ the living, present Lord of the church? In what ways are members helped to shape Christian lives in families, occupations, and society, and how are they helped to alter destructive behavior?

The church's spiritual leadership should open beyond pastors to encompass a body of church members charged with responsibility for the ministry of God's people in a particular Christian community.

Community faith. "If there be anyone who dogmatizes against the received doctrine, conference is to be held with him. If he listens to reason he is to be dismissed without scandal or dishonor."[21]

The consistory was responsible for the maintenance of evangelical truth. Both Catholic "errors" and enthusiasts "excesses" were subject to correction through instruction. The principal means of strengthening devotion to evangelical truth were regular preaching, the Catechism of the Church of Geneva, and the Geneva Academy. The consistory required everyone to participate in worship so that they would hear the fullness of the gospel Sunday and Wednesday worship were strongly encouraged, although provision was made among the three city churches for daily worship, with twenty sermons each week. For his part, Calvin worked to ensure that preaching and teaching in the Geneva churches centered on careful exposition of the biblical text, communicated with sensitivity to the context of the people.

Pastors' responsibility to proclaim the Word of God is central to their calling as "ambassadors of Christ." In a comment on 2 Timothy 2:15, Calvin noted that Paul's metaphor, "rightly handling the word of truth," captures the central purpose of proclamation. He asked what purpose sermons serve if people could read the Bible for themselves. Calvin answered that "Paul assigns to teachers the duty of dividing or cutting, as if a father, in giving food to his children, were dividing the bread, by cutting it into small pieces." Thus he advises Timothy to "cut aright," by which he means "an allotment of the word which is judicious, and which is well suited to the profit of the hearers. Some mutilate it, others tear it, others torture it, others break it in pieces, others, keeping by the outside, (as we have said,) never come to the soul of doctrine." To all these faults Paul contrasts "dividing aright, that is, the manner of explaining which is adapted to edification; for that is the rule by which we must try all interpretation of Scripture."[22]

Christian doctrine found concise explication in the Geneva Catechism, a "Plan for Instructing Children in the Doctrine of Christ." The catechism rehearsed faith (Apostles' Creed), law (Ten Commandments), prayer (the Lord's Prayer), and sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper). It was taught to all children as a way of transmitting evangelical faith to coming generations. The academy, forerunner of the University of Geneva, was established to regularize the training of pastors at the highest theological and pastoral level. The education of both children and pastors was a principal means of establishing and sustaining the young Reformation. The consistory bore special responsibility for dealing with breakdowns in religious education such as absence from worship; failure to learn the creed, commandments, and Lord's Prayer; and neglect of the catechism. The typical remedy was exhortation, repentance, and tutoring rather than punishment. The consistory functioned more like a department of education than a Protestant inquisition.

Contemporary congregations and denominations value diversity. The diversity of the Christian community in age, gender, race, ethnicity, and other natural characteristics is an imperative of the gospel, so the church should strive to make actual commitments to diversity. But many congregations and denominations also value a different kind of diversity—variety in Christian belief. Welcoming wide theological diversity among members is often accompanied by embracing the same among ministers. Our celebration of theological diversity may spring, in part, from a fear of rigid orthodoxy, demanding that everyone march in lockstep. But it also springs from a cultural assumption that religious belief is a private matter and that no one should presume to question another's personal faith. Reducing Christian faith to private opinion was anathema to Calvin, who sought to build a loving community that was grounded in common trust in the gospel and shared patterns of Christian living.

Calvin's understanding maintains that the church's ministry is responsible for teaching the shape of Christian faith. Pastors are not theological free agents,

released from obligation to the deep patterns of Christian faith and faithfulness. Expecting pastors and other church officials to teach the faith through preaching, liturgy, educational programs, and other means of witness to the gospel does not mean requiring narrow, severe uniformity. However, expecting that the faith will be taught recognizes that diversity of belief is not always benign. Some church members harbor beliefs about "god," sin, heaven and hell, spirits, prayer, and a host of other "religious" matters that are not only outside the bounds of historic Christian faith but are also harmful to personal and communal well-being. Calvin set a high value on right understanding of God's Way in the world, and he places responsibility for ensuring fidelity to gospel truth in the hands of a corporate body, not the pastor alone.

Community worship. "If anyone is negligent in coming to church, so that a noticeable contempt of the communion of the faithful is evident, or if any show himself contemptuous of the ecclesiastical order, he is to be admonished, and if he prove obedient dismissed in friendliness."[23]

Calvin believed that participation in worship was the chief means of glorifying God, knowing the real presence of Christ in Word and sacrament, and receiving instruction in the faith. He was also clear that worship was the chief means of establishing a co*mmuni*ty of faith, for neglect of worship evidenced contempt for both God and neighbors. Worshipers were expected to learn by heart the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. In a society in which only few could read, knowing these three enabled full participation in worship and provided the essential truths of Christian faith and life.

Consistory registers show that when worshipers did not know the creed, commandments, or Lord's Prayer, they were not punished but rather assigned a tutor, often a child, because children had studied the full catechism. The consistory also required that baptisms occur in public worship (no "emergency" baptisms by midwives) and that both parents be present (previously, fathers had been noticeably absent). For Calvin, common worship was the principal means of shaping a faithful Christian community, so it was essential that the whole community participate actively in all elements of the service.

In our time, worship is an optional activity for many church members. Typically, less than half of a congregation is in the pews on a given Sunday. In an increasingly unchurched American society, dwindling worship attendance produces anxiety among church leaders. This leads, in turn, to a search for ways to make worship more appealing. Strategies tend to focus on matters of style—contemporary music, casual dress, and folksy sermons. Matters of style are not unimportant; Calvin's reformation of worship included "stylistic" innovations such as using the language of the people instead of Latin, dispensing with side chapels that encouraged private devotion rather than corporate worship, initiating congregational singing, and introducing the practices of reciting the creed, singing the Ten Commandments, and praying the Lord's Prayer in common.

Style must not devolve into mere stylishness, however. The question is always whether the form of congregational worship directs persons and the congregation itself to the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—or diverts attention away from God to worshipers themselves. Concentrating on what people are thought to want or need may result in making worship about us rather than about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Calvin understood that worship is the single most powerful shaper of congregational and personal faith and faithfulness, for it is the time in congregational life that the most people are gathered together. The substance of Scripture and prayers, hymns and preaching, sacraments and announcements, children's sermons and choir anthems all form or malform Christian faith and life. That is why Calvin gave exceptional attention to the order, content, and design of worship and why he insisted that people were obligated to gather as a community of faith in grateful worship of God. Calvin's concern for worship cuts against the grain of our individualistic, free choice culture when he equates "negligence in coming to church" with "contempt of the community of the faithful." Regular participation in worship is a mark of love of neighbors as well as love of God. Few contemporary American churches will call persons and families to account for neglecting worship, but it is possible to convey the Christian responsibility to worship God rather than promote stylistic inducements.

Community discipline. "As for each man's conduct, for the correction of faults, proceedings should be in accordance with the order which our Lord commands. Yet all this should be done with such moderation, that there be no rigour by which anyone may be injured; for even the corrections are only medicine for bringing back sinners to the Lord."[24]

Consistory registers disclose that the most common reasons for appearing before the elders and pastors were domestic conflicts—spousal abuse and quarrels over inheritances, for example—and failure to learn the creed, commandments, and Lord's Prayer. The most common outcomes were reconciliation and instruction. It is notable that domestic disputes, public drunkenness,

adultery, and similar matters were dealt with by the church, not the civil authorities, and that, consequently, the aim was personal reformation, not municipal punishment.

There was a time, in the not-too-distant past, when church boards-sessions, vestries, councils—took responsibility for the faith and morals of church members. Regular visitation and periodic intervention was the norm. Today, in most congregations, such a practice would be unthinkable. It is assumed that our life outside of church activities is nobody's business but our own. Our personal, family, and occupational lives are private, immune from the meddling of the church. If we seek counseling from the pastor, this should be confidential. Unspoken "privacy laws" are characteristics of congregational life, and explicit privacy protections for pastors are regularized in judicatories. "The correction of faults" by church councils may not be a possibility in most congregations, but this must not imply indifference to the moral life of persons.

Calvin's ordering of ministries assumes that how Christians live is as crucial as what they believe. Faith and faithfulness are interrelated aspects of lived discipleship, so reformation of personal and corporate *livi*ng and *believi*ng are equally important. How spouses treat one another and how parents and children relate are central to Christian faith. Individual captivity to alcohol abuse or gambling addiction are moral issues that are the proper concern of the Christian community. Teenage girls' struggles with cultural images of ideal body types and teenage boys' fascination with violent, often misogynistic video games call for pastoral care. Church members' work lives—where they spend far more time than in church—are central to their C*hristian v*ocation. The Geneva Consistory was an appropriate communal vehicle for encouraging personal and corporate morality. The ministry of the consistory demonstrates Calvin's rule that pastoral care is not the sole province of the pastor but must become an explicit ministry shared with the congregation's elders and deacons.

The Venerable Company of Pastors

When Calvin returned to Geneva from Strasbourg in 1541, he set out to assemble and maintain a company of ministers who were committed to Reformed evangelical faith, competent interpreters of Scripture, and dedicated to pastoral duties. Central to this undertaking was his conviction that committed, competent, and dedicated individuals serving unconnected parishes would not sustain reformation of faith and life in Geneva. If the gospel were to take root among the people, the Geneva parishes—three within the walled city and sixteen in the surrounding countryside had to share a common life, and their pastors had to share a collegial ministry.

Calvin was certain that faithful Christian faith and life within and among congregations depended on faithful Christian community among their pastors. What he understood about life within a congregation applies equally to his understanding of pastors' lives:

> For if anyone were sufficient to himself and needed no one else's help (such is the pride of human nature), each man would despise the rest and be despised by them. The Lord has therefore bound his church together with a knot that he foresaw would be the strongest means of keeping unity, while he entrusted to men the teaching of salvation and everlasting life in order that through their hands it might be communicated to the rest. [25]

Geneva's Company of Pastors was Calvin's instrument for ensuring that pastors joined one another in bonds of mutual responsibility and that through them Geneva's congregations joined in communion with one another. The Company of Pastors met together regularly to engage in biblical and theological study, encourage and challenge one another on their preaching and pastoral conduct, examine and recommend placement of ministers, and make provision for missionary work in neighboring countries. Together with the consistory, the Company of Pastors formed the reformation nucleus of the church in Geneva.

*Co*rpo*rate Scriptu*re. "First it will be expedient that all the ministers, for preserving purity and concord among themselves, meet together one certain day each week, for discussion of the Scriptures."[26]

Geneva's Venerable Company of Pastors embodied Calvin's commitment to collegial leadership. Pastors and their congregations were not to be autonomous but rather bound together in a multifaceted pattern of mutuality. Notably, pastors were responsible for and accountable to one another in all aspects of their ministry. Pastors' accountability began with their capacity to read, interpret, and employ Scripture in service of their congregations. Thus, when the company met each Friday morning at 7:00 in the Cathédrale St. Pierre or the adjacent Auditoire (formerly the Notre-Dame-la-Neuve Chapel), portions of Scripture were discussed in systematic order, led by one of the pastors. Variously called the *congrégation, conference des Escriptures,* or *colloqu*e, the weekly Bible study may have been ordered according to Calvin's lectures on Scripture, but leadership was shared by all pastors.

The Scripture study portion of the weekly meeting was open to the public and people came, listening to their pastors expound Scripture, even participating in the discussion following the initial presentation. A

contemporary description by a visitor to the city in 1550 provides a glimpse into this remarkable gathering:

> Every week, on Fridays, a conference is held in which all their ministers and many of the people participate. Here one of them reads a passage from Scripture and expounds it briefly. Another speaks on the matter what to him is according to the Spirit. A third person gives his opinion and a fourth adds some things in his capacity to weigh the issue. And not only the ministers do so, but everyone who has come to listen.[27]

Although some contemporary pastors participate in lectionary study groups as a resource for the preparation of sermons, it is intriguing to imagine today's ministers participating in something like Geneva's c*ongrégatio*n. It would be a weekly gathering of all pastors in a locality, one of whom would be responsible for presenting a portion of Scripture. All pastors would have studied the text in advance, and some would be designated respondents. The presentation and discussion would take place amid a hundred or so church members, who would also be invited to ask questions and share their views on the passage. The ministers would be responsible to one another and to church members for their knowledge and pastoral application of the Bible.

In one of his many letters, Calvin wrote about the c*ongrégation,* "Not only for ministers is such training useful, but a number of the people who are led by an outstanding zeal to understand the Scripture experience part of its usefulness. ... I know there are here pious men, who have no reason to be humble about their learning, who would rather miss two sermons than one exposition of Scripture like those heard here."[28]

*Corporate theolo*gy. "If there appear differences of doctrine, let the ministers come together to discuss the matter. Afterwards, if need be, let them call the elders to assist in composing the contention."[29]

Following the public study of Scripture, the Company of Pastors met in private to discuss scriptural, theological, pastoral, and ecclesiastical matters. Exposition and discussion in the *con*g*régation* were intended to be edifying to ministers and people alike, so contention was discouraged. In private, however, discussion could be more focused on ministers' doctrinal understanding, including the character and quality of their preaching. It is important to remember that Calvin used *preachin*g and *doctri*ne interchangeably. Unlike current understanding, in which the relationship of doctrine to preaching is tenuous, Calvin believed that doctrine informs the study of Scripture and that both shape proclamation. Doctrine, Scripture, and proclamation are all mutually enriching expressions of the gospel.

Calvin's preface to the *Institute*s sets out his understanding of the relationship of theology and Scripture: "It has been my purpose in this labor to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may have easy access to it and advance in it without stumbling."[30] The current division of ministerial education into self-contained "departments" of study, separating biblical studies from theology, is foreign to the integrated sense of faith and life that characterized the Geneva Reformation.

Calvin understood that just as it was necessary to examine ministers when they were ordained or elected, "so also it is necessary to have good supervision to maintain them in their duty."[31] "Supervision" was the ongoing responsibility of the company's exercise of collegial discussion, affirmation, and admonition. Discussion among the pastors was not an abstract academic exercise, for the church's faith and life were tied to that of its pastors. The search for truth required the company of pastors to engage in analysis, discussion, and debate and mutual critique because biblical, theological, and moral affairs were not private concerns or merely matters of personal opinion.

Company meetings were sometimes contentious. At one point the pastors became so weary of "the torrent of inept, erroneous, and absurd statements" of one of their colleagues that they censured him and prohibited him from speaking (but not from listening!).[32] Perhaps more serious was the outbreak in the c*ongrégation* of a serious controversy. Jerome Bolsec, a former monk who practiced medicine in Geneva, issued a rude, slanderous, public challenge to Calvin's teaching on predestination. His outburst led to his arrest and expulsion from the city. These incidents were the exception, however. The Company of Pastors was characterized by mutually helpful deliberation, discussion, debate, and deepened ministry.

Theological work of the Company of Pastors included "ecumenical" discussion and action. Led by Calvin, pastors analyzed differences among Reformed churches in Switzerland, searching for resolution. Deepening divides between the Reformed and Lutheran churches over the Lord's Supper were also examined in hopes that a way could be found to reach agreement. Conversely, the Catholic Council of Trent elicited harsh critique rather than a quest for common ground. In all cases, however, the Company of Pastors was concerned with the whole church, not restricting its scope to Geneva, particular parishes, or themselves.

*Corporate faithfulnes*s. "To obviate all scandals of living, it will be proper that there be a form of correction to which all submit themselves. It will also be the means

by which the ministry may retain respect, and the Word of God be neither dishonoured nor scorned."[33]

The Venerable Company of Pastors was a disciplined community. Its meetings were more than conversation about abstractions, for their purpose was to encourage pastors to grow in faith and faithfulness. Once every three months the company engaged in a session of mutual support and correction. Among the faults that required correction were lack of zeal for study and an undisciplined life. All of this was for the sake of the gospel—its proclamation, reception, and fulfillment.

Because "true and faithful" doctrine found expression in pastors' preaching, teaching, and pastoral care, each minister was accountable to the body for his understanding of Scripture, doctrine, and the exercise of pastoral duties. Pastors regularly heard each other preach in their congregations, so all were in a position to evaluate the relationship between doctrinal matters and pastoral practice. Among the faults that might need correction were heresy, fomenting schism, agitation against church order, blasphemy, simony, lack of zeal for study, a way of treating Scripture that gives offense, the pursuit of idle questions, and an undisciplined life. The company's exercise of mutual critique was not an inquisition but rather an honest and serious mutual supervision, necessary because the faith and life of pastors had an impact on that of the whole people of God. Yet the company did impose restrictions on mutual critique, limiting it to once every three months so that it did not assume disproportional importance.

Calvin's pastoral rule was to be lived out corporately. Individual attention to study, sacramental fidelity, pastoral care, and congregational ministries was insufficient. Pastors must be responsible for and accountable to one another regarding their fidelity to Word and sacrament and the conduct of ministry in their congregations.

Mutual Supervision Today

It is worth pondering the contrast between Geneva's Company of Pastors and the current reality of pastoral life. A pattern of weekly half-day meetings of pastors for prayer, serious biblical and theological study, and mutual accountability for their practice of ministry seems almost unimaginable in the contemporary church. Lectionary study groups, while valuable, are too narrowly focused on sermon preparation. Pastoral support groups often lack the honesty of mutual critique. Difference of doctrine is not in short supply among us, but coming together to discuss a matter is too often reduced to exchanging slogans and voting in an essentially political context. While historical experience shows that the practice of mutual affirmation and admonition can become harmful, ministers who live as theological and ethical free agents present a clear and present danger to the whole church.

Calvin's ordering of the church's ministries and his provision for patterns of mutuality among pastors were not designed for heresy hunting or moral policing. Calvin was concerned about the ordinary, week-to-week life of pastors and how the rhythm of their lives would honor God and serve their congregations and the wider church. The Company of Pastors embodied three practices designed to enhance fidelity to the Lord and the Christian community that are just as foundational today.

First, regular, ongoing, in-depth study of Scripture remains fundamental to pastors' capacity to proclaim the gospel. Proclamation is not confined to preaching and teaching, although it is essential to both. Proclamation of the gospel encompasses witness to Christ in all facets of personal and communal life, and certainly throughout the whole range of pastoral life. Confining biblical study to private sermon preparation may lead to secondhand reliance on the work of others or to idiosyncratic interpretations that draw congregational attention away from the good news of Christ's grace, God's love, and communion in the Holy Spirit. More broadly, restricting study of Scripture to solitary consideration deprives a pastor of the insights and the corrections of others.

Second, serious and sustained theological study is an essential component of veracity in preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and mission. Continual theological engagement is necessary in building the pastoral capacity to understand contemporary culture and respond faithfully to its challenges, to deal knowledgeably with church members' doubts and questions, to encourage faithful mission initiatives, and to wrestle with difficult moral issues. All of these normal pastoral activities require theological knowledge and insight; reliance on past seminary education and occasional continuing education seminars will not sustain pastors over the course of ministry. None of us possesses the rich theological wisdom necessary for the task. We need colleagues—both books and fellow pastors—as companions in the ongoing engagement with "the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom 11:33).

Third, biblical and theological wisdom is a necessary element in pastoral care. Church members deserve the truth of the gospel at all times, but certainly in moments of deep personal and communal significance—birth, baptism, confirmation, dating, marriage, hospitalization, death, funerals. People need the truth of the gospel in times of crisis—unintended pregnancy, birth defects, addiction, accidents, crime and imprisonment, marital infidelity, divorce. In moments such as these, pastors cannot fall back on pop therapy or religious clichés.

Only constant probing of the deep mystery of God with us and for us in the dying and rising Christ can prepare pastors to serve the personal needs of congregations and members.

The ministry of pastoral care is in constant need of the wisdom of other pastors, and also in need of challenge and correction. Are we saying our prayers? Attending to the sick and lonely? Being with grieving family members after a funeral? Confronting church members who abuse alcohol or mistreat their children?

The reality of pastors' lives is that none of this can be done alone. Only sustained, honest relationships with colleagues in ministry can provide pastors with patterns of mutual responsibility and accountability that ensure consistent engagement with Scripture, openness to think through the faith together with theological forebears, and the pastoral imagination and wisdom that fully serves congregations and members. The Geneva Consistory, Calvin's Company of Pastors, and his comprehensive understanding of the church's ministries were elements in a re-formed ecclesiology. While the particular forms instituted in sixteenth-century Geneva could not be duplicated in the contemporary church, Calvin's animating insights into the nature of the church and the purpose of pastoral ministry can find an appropriate form in twenty-first-century North America.

> Many are led either by pride, dislike, or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and meditation. ... In order, then, that pure simplicity of faith may flourish among us, let us not be reluctant to use this exercise of religion which God has shown us to be necessary and highly approved.[34]

I (Joseph) did not grow up in the church. My Sunday mornings were spent riding my bike on country roads in western Massachusetts delivering thick New York, Boston, and Springfield newspapers. I came to faith in my early twenties, and when I entered seminary I was woefully ignorant about Scripture, the history of the church, theology, and everything else. For three years, I was dependent on fellow students as well as professors for facts, knowledge, and wisdom.

My dependency did not end with a seminary degree. During my pastorates in Maryland, Ohio, and New York I continued to read because the more I learned, the more I understood there was yet more to understand. But I also sought out other pastors with whom I could talk about what we were reading and how that shaped our understanding of Christian faith and life, and what that meant to our pastoral vocation. Twenty-three years of my ministry were spent with marvelous colleagues in the Presbyterian Church's Office of Theology and Worship. Daily conversations, times of prayer, reading in common, and mutual affirmation and correction all deepened my faith and enhanced my ministry.

My theological and pastoral need for the company of others is as real now as it was on my first day in seminary. Calvin's pastoral "rule" is significant because of its thoroughly corporate character. He understood that spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral disciplines are never merely personal but are to be lived in company with other congregational leaders and fellow pastors, all within the ministry of the whole people of God. In our time, his insights offer good guidance for the re-formation of pastoral ministry.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Does Calvin's vision of the ministry of the whole people of God (and "unified plural ministries") suggest possibilities for the life of your congregation?

For Calvin, Scripture and theology were intertwined and complementary. How might your study of Scripture be enriched by ongoing theological study?

Does the celebration of the sacraments in your congregation "offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace"?

How might you approach other pastors about establishing a "company of pastors" among you?

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[1] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans., Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.1.4.

[2] Much of this section first appeared in Joseph Small, "A Call and Response Ecclesiology;" https:// pres-outlook.org/wp-content/uploads/*2013/12/*www.pcusa.org_media_uploads_oga_pdf_call_and response_ecclesiology.pdf.

[3] "The Ten Conclusions of Berne," in C*reeds of the Church*es, 3rd ed., ed. John A. Leith (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 129.

[4] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.9.

[5] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.17.

[6] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.17.

[7] The French Confession of 1559, trans. Ellen Babinsky and Joseph D. Small (Louisville, KY: Office of Theology and Worship, 1998), §35, 16.
[8] French Confession of 1559, §35, 16.
[9] A more detailed treatment of "unified plural ministry is found in Joseph D. Small, "Undivided Plural Ministry: Ordered Ministries and Episcope in the Reformed Tradition," *Ecumenical Trends* 32.1 (2003).
[10] John Calvin, "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," in C*alvin: Theological Treatise*s, ed. and trans. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964*)*, 184-216.
[11] Calvin*, Institutes* 4.3.2.
[12] Calvin*, Institutes* 4.3.2.
[13] John Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinance" in Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 58.
[14] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 58 (emphasis added).
[15] Calvin*, Institutes* 4.10.27.
[16] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 70.
[17] Cf. Robert M. Kingdon, ed., *Register of the Consisto*ry *at Geneva in the Tim*e *of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 18; Calvin, "Draft Order of Visitation of the Country Churches," in Reid, C*alvin: Theological Treatises,* 74.
[18] John Calvin "Draft Order of Visitation of the Country Churches," in Reid, C*alvin: Theological Treatises,* 74.
[19] Calvin, "Draft Order of Visitation," 74.
[20] Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and the Family: The Work of the Consistory in Geneva," *Pacific Theological Revie*w *17*, no. 3 (1984): 18.
[21] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 70.
[22] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (*Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 178-79.
[23] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 70.
[24] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 70.
[25] Calvin*, Institutes* 4.3.2.
[26] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 60.
[27] Pier Paolo Vergerio, as quoted in Eric A. de Boer, "The *Congrégation*: An In-Service Theological Training Center for Preachers to the People of Geneva," in C*alvin and the Compan*y *of Pasto*rs, ed. David Foxgrover, Calvin Studies Society Papers 2003 (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2004), 59.
[28] Calvin, letter to Wolfgang Musculus, quoted in de Boer, "The *Congrégation,*" 82.
[29] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 60.
[30] Calvin, I*nstitutes,* "John Calvin to the Reader," 4.
[31] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 60.
[32] Scott M. Manetsch, C*alvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emer*ging Re*formed Church, 1536-1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 135.
[33] Calvin, "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 60.
[34] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.5.

Hilton Head Theology Conference Workshops to Equip and Encourage Congregational Leaders

1. **Forging Theological Friendships**–Jerry Andrews, Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, San Diego, CA, & James C. Goodloe IV, Executive Director of the Foundation for Reformed Theology, Richmond, VA
2. **Rediscovering the Office of Elder**–Eric Laverentz, Lead Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Edmond, OK
3. **The Witness of Women in the Confessing Church During the Third Reich**–Martha Burnett, Administrative Assistant, *Theology Matters*
4. **Table Talk: An Invitation to Discuss the Lord's Supper**–Charles Partee, Professor of Historical Theology, Emeritus, Pittsburgh Seminary, PA, & Walter Taylor, Pastor, Oak Island Presbyterian Church, NC
5. **Being and Making Disciples in the Small Church Context**–Tee Gatewood, Pastor, Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church, Banner Elk, NC
6. **Theological Formation in the Local Church**–Bryan Burton, Pastor, Hope Community Church, Lakeland, FL
7. **Re-thinking Worship Space**–Randy Working, Pastor, Lompoc Presbyterian Church, Lompoc, CA

Others Speakers: John Burgess, Professor of Systematic Theology, Pittsburgh Seminary, PA; Richard Burnett, *Theology Matters*; James Edwards, Professor of Theology Emeritus, Whitworth University, WA; Tim McConnell, Lead Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Colorado Springs, CO; Sara Jane Nixon, Pastor, New Dublin Presbyterian Church, New Dublin, VA; Aaron Williams, Pastor, University Presbyterian Church, Seattle, WA, et al.

Dr. Randal Working is President of *Theology Matters*. Dr. Richard Burnett is Executive Director and Managing Editor. The Board of Directors consists mostly of ruling and teaching elders in various Presbyterian denominations. *Theology Matters* exists to equip and encourage, instruct and inspire, members of the Presbyterian family and wider Christian community through the clear and coherent articulation of theology that is reformed according to God's Word. It is sent free to individuals who requests it. You can reach us at 864-378-5416 or admin@theologymatters.com or at our web site: www.theologymatters.com.

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