

NO. 114
Box-6
Folder-N

"CHURCH-PASTOR RELATIONS"

Response to Herb Brandt's Paper by Arthur Flaming

I would like to address myself to the three issues that Herb raises on the second page of his paper, point 2. "Relationship Issues." Herb raises or narrows his paper to three questions:

- I. "What are some factors (issues) that cause deterioration in Church-Pastor relations?"

The Mennonite Brethren Church has followed the pattern of other denominations in the call extended to the "one pastor leadership role." No longer does the local congregation discern the pastoral gifts within its membership and affirm a young man, encourage him to prepare for the pastoral ministry and come back to serve as pastor of his home congregation. The feeling and need seems to be that a "stranger" would be more objective since he does not have close friends, or relatives in the congregation. The "call" is extended after a week-end of candidating and so the young man of 31 years of age with 18 years of experience arrives on the scene. His job-discription is very vague and ambiguous. Each member of the congregation has his own expectation of the new man. At best the pastor comes as an apprentice for a period of two or three years while he is closely watched, observed, heard and evaluated. At the end of this "grace" period the congregation votes to determine his future ministry to the congregation. During this time period he has high visability. He stands alone and apart. During the probation period he is hardly "one of us." We expect him to be a good preacher-teacher, a good administrator, good with youth, good in public relations, a financial expert, a Christian Ed director, a good leader, etc. Besides this he must have all 17 gifts of the Spirit.

In my observation of having worked with some 150 pastors in the Southern District since becoming District Minister the major factor in the development of tension is a lack of communication. At best, the job-discription is very broad and general and the role is hazy and ambiguous. However the performance

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expectation is high and demanding and the pastor is to "be all things to all men" and to function efficiently in many areas in order to be a "good pastor." My counsel would be to have a clearly defined job-discription which should be narrow and restricting, maybe limited to preaching, teaching and counseling. Leadership in the congregation must be shared. We need to get back to the "team-ministry through shared leadership." The paid, or one pastor system as a constitutional monarch performing as a professional expert within the church is not an example of a biblical model. Another factor that brings tension is the "ownership principal." Paradoxically, congregations do not wish to have a "hir^eling" as their pastor (John 10) but the ownership principal seems to imply that we make a hir^eling out of our pastors. The people feel that because they pay his salary this gives them the right to dictate his function and performance. This makes him a hir^eling.

Another factor is lack of ministry. Congregational leaders need to become ministering brethren to the pastor. The process of discipleship is both toward the pastor from his leading brethren and from pastor to the leadership group that he needs to disciple. It is a rewarding experience to see mature church leadership groups serve as discipling people who feel it their biblical obligation and responsibility to minister to and train their pastor and see him develop the pastoral gifts. There is a definite place and time for each congregation to have its Aquila and Priscillas who will minister to the "Apollos" in their midst (Acts 18). The Apostle Paul was grateful to the many who had ministered with him and to him (Romans 16).

not just a governing board!

II. "How could these factors (issues) be avoided or resolved?"

In the matter of communication we need to state that there are times when a pastor needs confrontation, and other times needs affirmation. The brethren in the church council, or the deacon brethren need to keep the lines of communications open to and with their pastor. He is human and makes mistakes, but he is a servant and a brother, as are the rest of the church members. Ephesians 4:15, 25 "truthing it in love..." When members in the congregation complain, leaders

music leadership also needs to affirm pastor in his ministry

in the congregation need to minister to such members in redemptive love in behalf of the pastor. God has given gifts to the church (I Cor. 12) and when the gifts are in operation the body can be and will be built (including the pastor). The great "cop-out" which I have observed in my visit with church committees and boards and church members is; "touch not God's anointed" (I Sam. 26:9). It seems that it is more spiritual to have feelings of hostilities and lovelessness for our pastor, and to talk "about" him then it is to talk TO him. Pastors too, need to be open and flexible to the counsel of their people and not become defensive when someone makes a suggestion to him.

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gossip!*

I would like to encourage our congregations to explore the multiple leadership concept as taught in the New Testament. Herb refers to this in his paper on page three, point two. We need to come to a much better understanding as to why God has given gifts to the church. We can be sure that His intent and purpose is not that one man do all the "carrying out" in ministry in the local congregation. Leadership must be shared.

III. "How should the matter of evaluation of the pastor and the decision for continuation or termination of his services be handled in a congregation?"

Evaluation should be an on-going process and this process is included in the New Testament provision of ministry. When members are open in their dialogue with their pastor, insights are gained and people and pastor grow in love and in Christian maturity. The brotherhood concept of which Mennonite Brethren speak so much of needs to be included in redemptive love toward the pastor. Who is his brother? Where are his brethren?

*opportunities
for more
objective evaluation
needs to
be provided
and the means of it
perfected*

When New Testament ministry is in evidence in a warm, loving, caring congregation everyone is being disciplined and Christ is glorified. The so called "vote of confidence" finds no support in the New Testament, ministry does. The vote of confidence can be an escape method for people who are not patient or willing to work out differences in Christian dialogue or ministry and thus can always "vote out their pastor."

A long-term pastorate is the ideal. In it both the pastor and his people grow in Christian maturity (Eph. 4). The image of the congregation is enhanced in the community and Christ is glorified. We live in a day of change. Pastoral changes too can be good for both pastor and congregation. The gifts which a pastor has will gradually be assimilated by his people. With this comes a direction in mission which is reflected by the congregation. Examples might be; a pastor who is strong in missions, or strong in evangelism, or building of body-life. The pastor in his reflection might come to the place where he feels that the congregation needs a new direction in mission emphasis and that another pastor could do this. This feeling might also arise in the congregation. Leaders in the congregation who sense and feel the mood and climate of the congregation regarding a change would share this with the pastor. Counsel might be given to him to terminate his ministry with the congregation. It might be well to set a termination date so that he can make known his availability to the conference. A vote need not be taken.

Many of our congregations do have a term of ministry which is followed by the vote of confidence. It is my feeling that when a congregation votes on the pastor that the church council should give a positive recommendation to the congregation regarding the vote. We should not vote on a question, but on a recommendation. Example would be: (Negative) "Do you desire to have our pastor serve for another term?" Yes or no. (Positive) "The Church Council recommends that we extend the call to our pastor to serve for another term of ____ years." Yes or no.