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## Pastoral Care and the Sanctuary

### Session Starter Number 1

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#### Prayer:

God of light and truth, by your gracious mercy, you have called us to lead and serve the church as ruling and teaching elders. By your spirit, you empower us to take our place in the body of Christ and to care for our congregation. As we meet together, grant us clarity of mind, quietness of spirit and integrity of purpose so that all we do may be according to your will. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### Introduction:

Chapter 3 of the Book of Forms deals with matters relating directly to the ministry of sessions within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Within chapter 3, section 110 states, in part,

**"The session is responsible for ...  
the pastoral care of all persons within the fellowship of the congregation."**

Pastoral care is an essential element within the body of Christ and is one of the most powerful ways that we can demonstrate the love of God to one another. Pastoral care can't be left to the minister alone. It is something everyone within the congregation must strive to share. As spiritual leaders within the congregation, however, elders have a special responsibility to see that members and adherents receive the care they need. In 1 Peter chapter 5 we read:

(Invite an elder to read the following passage.)

**To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.**

1 Peter 5:1-4

#### A brief commentary:

(Invite another elder to read the following background to the scripture)

From the earliest years of Christianity, elders were appointed to be shepherds of the Church of God (Acts 14:23, 20:28). As a fellow elder, Peter notes some of the possible perils and ponderous privileges that come with the eldership. He warns elders to resist the temptation to abuse the power that may accompany the role, and encourages them to serve willingly and humbly, like a shepherd caring for sheep. All this is done for the sake of the Chief Shepherd.

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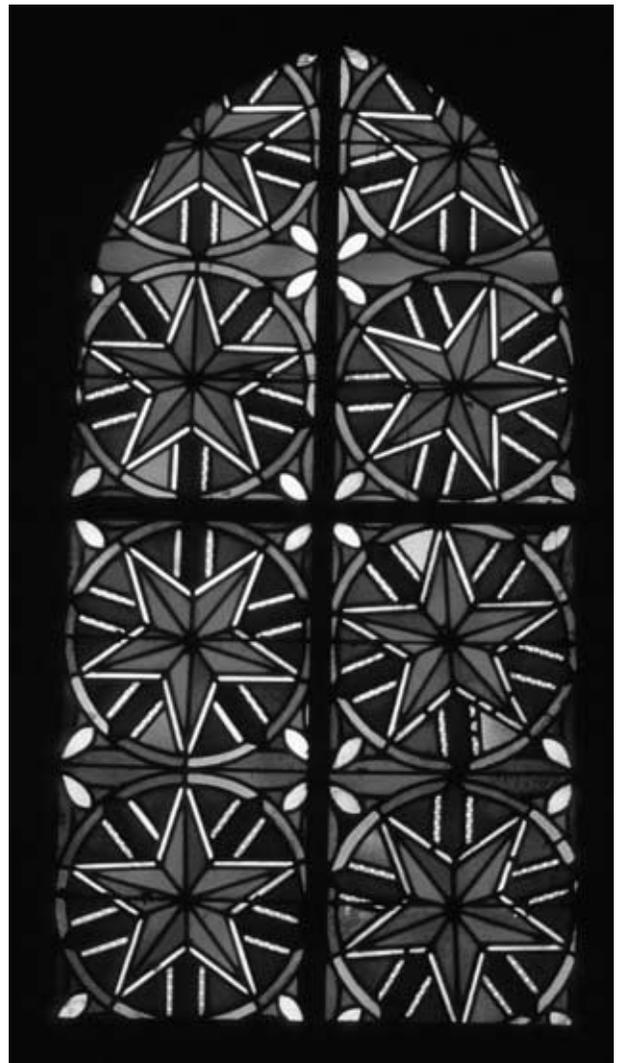
## Reflection:

There are a vast number of ways in which elders can apply pastoral care within a congregation, but this devotional ponders how pastoral care can be expressed in the sanctuaries of the church.

Within the context of our faith, the word "sanctuary" suggests a sacred place where worship takes place. It is a place of prayer, song and blessing. It is a place where we are particularly aware of God's holy presence as we listen for his word. If we take the definition a step further, sanctuary can also mean a place of refuge and peace.

As you may remember, in Victor Hugo's classic, *Notre Dame de Paris*, the beautiful Esmeralda is accused of witchcraft and murder by her jilted admirer and she is sentenced to death. While she stands on the gallows before an angry mob, the noose already encircling her neck, Quasimodo suddenly swoops down on a rope, releases Esmeralda and carries her into Notre Dame cathedral crying, "Sanctuary! Sanctuary!"

For the most part the sanctuaries of our churches are places of sanctuary: sacred spaces of refuge and peace. There are times, however, when they are anything but. The editor of a community newspaper almost stopped going to worship because the sanctuary was, for him, becoming a place of abuse. In the time before and after worship, members of the congregation, including elders, would frequently assail him with complaints about the last edition and suggestions for the next. He welcomed "letters to the editor" but in appropriate ways and at appropriate times. He had come to church to be blessed, instead he was blasted. It was only after he began to let others know how he felt that sanctuary was restored.



## Questions:

*(Together or in small groups, invite the elders to discuss the following questions.)*

1. When is our sanctuary not a place of sanctuary?
2. How can we as elders ensure that sanctuary is found in the sanctuary?
3. How does the worship service provide pastoral care?
4. What new ways of providing pastoral care could be added to our worship time?
5. How could our sanctuary be open more often for people to spend time in prayer and reflection?

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## Pastoral Care and the Feeding of Sheep

### Session Starter Number 2

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#### Prayer:

Almighty God, we have set aside this time to meet together as a session. We have come to pray, to seek your will, and to serve the church of Jesus Christ. Lead us, guide us, and bless us so that we may have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Enable us to reach out to each other, our congregation, and the world beyond with hope, peace, love, joy and faith. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### Introduction:

Chapter 3 of the Book of Forms deals with matters relating directly to the ministry of sessions within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Within chapter 3, section 110 states, in part,

**"The session is responsible for ...  
the pastoral care of all persons within the fellowship of the congregation."**

This is the second "Session Starter" to focus on the role of the elder and the responsibility of pastoral care. As noted in the first devotional, pastoral care is an essential element within the body of Christ and is one of the most powerful ways we can demonstrate the love of God to one another. It must not be left to the minister alone. It is something everyone within the congregation must strive to share. As spiritual leaders within the congregation, however, elders have a special responsibility to see that members and adherents receive the care they need. In this devotional we ponder the connection between pastoral care and the feeding of sheep.

#### Scripture:

(Invite an elder to read the following passage.)

**When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter,  
"Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"  
"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."  
Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."  
Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"  
He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."  
Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."  
The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"  
Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?"  
He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."  
Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." John 21:15-18a**

**A Brief Commentary:** (Invite another elder to read the following background to the scripture)

The risen Jesus appeared to his disciples on the coast of the Sea of Tiberias. After a breakfast of bread and fish roasted over a small cooking fire, Jesus spoke with Peter. Peter the fisherman, still dripping wet after wading ashore from his boat, was to become Peter the shepherd. A man, who had dipped nets into the sea all his life, was about to be asked to take care of lambs.

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Three times Jesus questioned the depth and extent of Peter's love. Three times Peter replied with faith and devotion. Three times Jesus responded to the profession of faith by saying, "Feed my sheep." This seaside moment brings to mind another time and place - the night Jesus was arrested. As Peter lurked in the shadows of the high priest's courtyard, three times he was asked, "Aren't you one of his disciples?" Three times Peter answered emphatically, "I am not!" Moments later, he wept bitter tears of shame.

As waves lapped at his feet and birds cried in the air, the three-fold denial was pardoned through a three-fold profession of faith. Restored, Peter was given a nurturing ministry.

### Reflection:

How many of us when we look inside ourselves, discover Peter gazing back at us? Though we generally long to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we also find ourselves, from time to time, denying his existence. We deny him with our words and actions. The good news of God's grace is that, like Peter, we are forgiven and given nurturing ministries to fulfill. We show our love for Jesus through pastoral care; by feeding the flock of God's kingdom.

The word "pastor" is derived from the word for shepherd. When elders provide pastoral care, they care for others the way a shepherd cares for sheep. Part of that care involves seeing that the sheep are led to lush pastures and are well nourished. We provide pastoral care when we ensure God's sheep are well fed. In *Searching for Shalom*, one of her moving books of poetry, Ann Weems points to the vital nature of pastoral care.



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## **Feeding Sheep**

He said, "Feed my sheep."

There were no conditions:

Least of all, Feed my sheep if they deserve it.

Feed my sheep if you feel like it.

Feed my sheep if you have leftovers.

Feed my sheep if the mood strikes you.

if the economy's OK...if you're not too busy ...

No conditions...just, "Feed my sheep."

Could it be that God's Kingdom will come  
when each lamb is fed?

We who have agreed to keep covenant are called to feed sheep  
even when it means the grazing will be done on our own front lawns.

Note: Books by Ann Weems are available in The Book Room at Church Offices  
1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111

### **Questions:**

(Together or in small groups, invite the elders to discuss the following questions.)

1. How many ways can we, as elders, provide pastoral care by feeding sheep?
2. How can we ensure the young, middle aged and senior sheep of our congregation are being fed?
3. How can we feed hungry sheep in our community or other parts of the world?

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## Follow-up study/reading for

### *Pastoral Care and the Sanctuary*

(Use for retreats, study or personal reflection)

By Dorothy Henderson

I have just completed a large survey of 240 young adults who grew up in a mainline (mainly Presbyterian) church. Most of these young adults are still active. Here's a portion of what they have to say to elders.

#### 1. The young adults said, " 'Church' is a habit...a good habit."

Like all other practices in life, attending to one's religious life can be a meaningful habit. There seems to be a direct link between regularity of attendance as children and continuance of attendance as young adults. Further, most of the respondents to the survey expressed appreciation for the values associated with regular worship. As Carol Wehrheim points out, "...gathering with other church members to worship and pray is one way that you say by your actions that the life of your congregation is important to you and your family. You allot your family time to be a part of it and to support others through your presence."<sup>1</sup> The young adults say it this way:

*Combined with my upbringing, going to church led me to a great interest in spirituality. (Male, age 22)*

*Sometimes going to church was a chore, but in hindsight, it was an important part of my life. I'm glad it happened. (Male, age 22)*

*The things I learned, I held on to later. (Male, age 24)*

#### Discuss this:

- What can you do as elders and ministers to encourage regular church attendance?
- In his book *Make Room for the Boom...or Bust*, author Gary McIntosh<sup>2</sup> maintains that young parents come or return to the church for many reasons:
  - They want to provide values and programs for their children.
  - They have a desire for stability and nostalgia.
  - As they grow older, they become more accepting of institutional life of all kinds, including the church.
  - They have a desire to belong, be accepted and have an identity.
  - They are disillusioned with aspects of culture and want enduring and lasting values.
  - They are interested in spiritual things, especially new expressions of spirituality.
  - They are insecure about the future, frightened and confused.

If these reasons are true, what do they tell you about making your church more inviting to young families?

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<sup>1</sup>*Giving Together: A Stewardship Guide for Families*, p. 30

<sup>2</sup>Fleming Revell, 1997, p. 35

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## 2. The young adults said, "Please...do something with worship."

Of particular interest in this survey is the impatience that young adults expressed around worship. They didn't much care for their worship experiences as children and, even though some of them express comfort in currently participating in the familiar patterns of worship, they long for variety and flexibility. In fact, they indicated that they would "vote with their feet," and simply go to other churches to have this need satisfied.

The solution seems simple. An alternative worship needs to happen. Often children, youth and young adults are eager to be part of the planning and leading of alternative worship services. If a congregation does not have sufficient resources to do this for your own congregation, it is a great opportunity for congregations to do it ecumenically. It has been my experience as a leader in the *Young Children and Worship* program that children love and appreciate worship and can participate fully when adjustments are made to make worship more accessible. In regular corporate worship, worship bags, children's bulletins, explanations and stories can all help to make worship more accessible to children.<sup>3</sup>

### Discuss this:

- Why have churches been so reluctant to involve children in worship? (Only 24 per cent of the 240 respondents remembered being in church for the whole service between ages 4 and 12.)
- In the mid-'70s, William Abernethy produced a creative book entitled *A New Look at Sunday Morning*. In that book Abernethy argues that *all people*, regardless of age or stage need learning opportunities, worship and community opportunities on Sunday morning. He advocated a 1 hour, 45-minute Sunday morning with 10 minutes to gather and hear the theme of the day, 35 minutes in age-appropriate learning environments, 15 minutes to break for refreshments and community, and 45 minutes to gather for worship. In the final 45 minutes people bring aspects of their learning to present as their offering. It is a wonderful and creative vision. Why did this vision for an integrated Sunday morning never seemed to "catch on"?
- If young adults (and probably children and youth) are crying out for more contemporary styles of worship, why is it not being provided? Is this something that the young people themselves can have a major role in designing and leading?

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<sup>3</sup> An excellent resource are the three volumes of *Forbid them not*, Years A, B, C, Abingdon Press, 1991, 1994 by Carolyn Brown. Brown uses the lectionary passages to give an exegesis of the scriptures from the child's point of view, suggests sermon resources, appropriate hymns, offers a children's bulletin and suggests simple movement that is appropriate for the day.