

A Vision for Christian Ministry: Clergy Education in the Church of the Nazarene

The chief purpose of all persons—indeed, for all of the creation—is to worship, love and serve God. God has made himself known in his deeds of creation and redemption. As the Redeemer, God has called into existence a people who embody, celebrate and declare his Name and his ways. The life of God with his people and the world constitutes the Story of God. That story is recorded principally in the Old and New Testaments, and by the resurrected Christ who lives as the head of his Church. The Church lives to declare the whole Story of God. This it does in many ways—in the lives of its members who are even now being transformed by Christ, in the sacraments, in oral testimony and through preaching. All members of the Body of Christ are called to exercise a ministry of witness and service. No one is excluded.

In God's own wisdom he calls some persons to fulfill the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel and caring for God's people in a form that is referred to as the ordained ministry. God is the actor, not humans. In the Church of the Nazarene God calls and persons respond. They do not elect the Christian ministry. All persons whom God calls to the ordained ministry are amazed that God would select them. They should continue to be humbled and amazed by God's call. The *Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, states that "We recognize and hold that the head of the Church calls some men and women to the more official and public work of the ministry." It adds, "The church, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, will recognize the Lord's call" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 400).

An ordained Christian minister has as his or her chief responsibility to declare in many ways the whole story of God as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. However, such ministry can be practiced only after a period of careful preparation. Indeed, given the ever-changing demands placed upon the minister, "preparation" never ceases.

A person who enters the Christian ministry becomes in a distinct sense a steward of the Gospel of God. He or she becomes a steward of the "mystery of God" which is Christ, the Messiah of God, the Redeemer. A steward manages carefully what one's master entrusts to him or her. For a good steward there is plenty of room for diligence and alertness, but no room for laziness or privilege. Good stewards recognize that they are stewards only, not the owners, and that they will give an account of their stewardship to the master. Faithfulness to one's charge and to the Lord who issued it is the steward's principal passion. When properly understood, the Christian ministry should never be thought of as a "job." It is ministry, uniquely Christian ministry. No higher responsibility or joy can be known than to become a steward of the Story of God in Christ's Church.

Obviously one who does not recognize, or who understands and rejects, just how comprehensive and inclusive his or her stewardship is should stay away from the Christian ministry. Hence, the Church of the Nazarene believes that "The minister of

Christ is to be in all things a pattern to the flock—in punctuality, discretion, diligence, earnestness; ‘in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left’” (*Manual, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 401.1*).

In order to be a good steward of God’s Story one must, among other things, give oneself to careful and systematic study, both before and after ordination. This will occur not because he or she is forced to do so, but out of a love for God and his people, the world that he is working to redeem, and out of an inescapable sense of responsibility. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the attitude one brings to preparation for the ministry reveals much about what he or she thinks of God, the Gospel and Christ’s Church. The God who became incarnate in Jesus, and who made a way of salvation for all, gave his very best in the life, death and resurrection of His Son. In order to be a good steward, a Christian minister must respond in kind. Jesus told numerous parables about stewards who did not recognize the importance of what had been entrusted to them.

Of what then are Christian ministers stewards? What are some of the primary values that ought to inform and guide this special stewardship?

1. The integrity of the Gospel of God, and the God of the Gospel, must determine the content and form of Christian ministry, and the Christian minister.
2. A love for the Holy Scriptures as the inspired “Story of God.” *love of the God to whom the Bible bears witness*
3. The priority of the Kingdom of God, and the Church, over private (atomistic) salvation. *Gospel is that the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ*
4. A reception, cultivation and transmission of Apostolic Christian faith (including the Arminian and Wesleyan perspectives).
5. The power and meaning of our Lord’s resurrection, and of Pentecost.
6. The priority of Christian Hope over pagan despair.
7. The priority of transformation ^{over} ~~rather than~~ the priority of sin (sanctification).
8. Cultivation of one’s mind and one’s defining disposition as prerequisites for serving the Gospel.
9. An informed ability to exegete one’s world in the interest of evangelism, preaching and instruction in Christian discipleship.
10. A certainty that ^{Christ} ~~Christian~~ is God’s future, and the world’s future.