

OUT TO PASTOR: A NEWSLETTER FOR RETIRED PASTORS

Second Edition – June 2020 David S. Barnard, Editor

Advice: *(What I Wish I'd Known Then; What I'd Tell a Newly Ordained Pastor).*



TAKING A SABBATH: As a young pastor, I quickly went from sitting in my new office, looking around at the full bookshelves, and asking “How am I going to fill all this time?”, to a few weeks later, asking “How can I ever do what I need to do in the time I have?” It became easy to skip days off, trying to catch up. I soon learned what a mistake it is not to take a “sabbath” even when Sunday was busy from start to finish. I was tired and began to resent the demands of my calling. I needed my weekly sabbath day off! One year, a parishioner was dying in the local hospital, and I got in the habit of visiting every day, thinking the end was near. My month’s vacation was coming up soon, and I decided I should postpone it until after the man died. Fortunately, I consulted with a retired pastor in my congregation. He was insistent; he said, *“I once missed my vacation entirely doing what you are thinking about. And the person was still alive when I got back. I understand your caring and commitment, but trust me, you need to take your time away.”* I took his advice and, sure enough, the man was still there when I got back.

Struggles: *(Speaking from Experience; Hard truths; What hurt? What healed?)*



JOB SECURITY? I was in my first solo pastorate and guess I was naïve about some of the sad possibilities of small-town pastoring. One Fall, accompanied by two adult leaders from my congregation, I took our combined Presbyterian-Methodist Teen Fellowship

group to the next town over for a Halloween Haunted House experience. It was pretty tame but the kids enjoyed. A few days later, the Methodist Pastor called and said, *“I just wanted to let you know that I’m being forced out. I’m resigning.”* I was stunned and asked what happened and what I could do to support him. His reply was another shock; he said, *“Actually, you are part of the reason.”*

He went on to explain that one of the Methodist teens had returned home that night and told her parents that we had taken the kids to a bar and bought them alcohol. It was obviously nonsense, but the parents chose to believe her, and called other church members to demand that the pastor be fired for not going along and preventing it. I wanted him to fight, but he was already not particularly well-liked and decided his best course was to go peacefully. I drove straight to the teenager’s house and tried to help the parents understand that nothing like that happened, confident that they must know better than to believe such a crazy story. They stood firm and the pastor soon moved on.

Until that time, I had no idea how quickly some people could turn on a pastor and make their life miserable. I think I was a bit less secure in my job status ever after.

Humor: *(My Most Embarrassing Moments; You’ve Got to Laugh).*



GOING BATTY: During worship one Sunday, I opened the big pulpit Bible to read the scriptures for the day. When I flipped it open to my bookmark, a dead bat flopped over the page! Skilled pastor that I was, I yelled and jumped a foot! I picked the book up and flipped the bat onto the carpet, where a quick-minded elder came with a bag and disposed of it. I explained what had happened to the shocked congregation, and went through the rest of the service. After, I approached the teenaged girl who was our kids’ frequent babysitter and was running the sound system that day. I let her have it for pulling such a dumb trick, even as she denied doing it. (It wasn’t necessarily out of character for her; she could be a clown).

That afternoon at the manse, my phone rang. I answered to hear sobbing on the other end. *“What’s wrong?”* I asked. Between sobs, the person said, *“I, I, I put the bat in your Bible. It was on my pew when I got to church and, since you’d been kidding that the folk in the back*

should move up front because they'd found bat droppings on the back pews, I thought you put a fake bat there to tease me. I had no idea it was real!"

I thanked her for the confession and promised never to tell anyone who the real culprit was until after her death. (She's still alive and I've kept my word). You can imagine how I felt when I then had to call our babysitter and apologize over and over. She never let me forget it.

Inspiration: *(Scripture that Speaks to Me; Vital Faith Building; Spiritual Disciplines That Got Me Through).*

Please share yours for the next issue!

Pastors' Pet peeves: *(People Who Drove Me Nuts; Annoying Things People Say to Their Pastors; From Cynthia Huling Hummel).*

Every church has PETAs (pain in the asses) that's for sure. People sure felt free to critique my life, my choices, my clothes, my hair. It could be so hurtful!

Book Reviews: *(What I'm reading; Recommended reading; Still Learning After All These Years).*

I almost always have a serious book of Biblical studies, church history, or theology going, but also have a novel in progress, just for fun. I recently finished Nickel Mountain by John Gardner. I came to the section below about how the narrator's father dealt with a visit from the pastor and it had the ring of familiarity to me. See what you think:

Her father was easygoing, open, free with his money, a storyteller people would listen to for hours. He didn't believe or disbelieve in God, he said; he just didn't like churches. He didn't like hearing what he had to believe and what he mustn't believe—the very word believe made him curl his lip as he would when he listened to tear-jerking poetry or talk about flowers or songs about faraway places—and above all, he said, he didn't like grown men standing up and confessing in front of everybody, like drunks or like young lovers.

But that was not what he said to the Preacher. He said, "Evening, Reverend," and nodded, and when the Preacher talked about what a fine herd of cows he had (it had chronic mastitis and there wasn't a cow in the barn that gave more than a gallon) he would agree. Rightly, Henry said. If you told the Preacher the truth he would soon have control of you, would milk

you dry. The Preacher would say, "We've missed you lately in church, Frank," and her father would say only, "I haven't been going very regular, that's true." He hadn't darkened those doors in fifteen years. The Preacher would talk to him sadly, man to man, high-tone Biblical language that embarrassed Callie, and after her father had heard him out he'd look thoughtful and say, "There's a lot to what you say, Reverend."

Continued calling: *(What is God calling me to do now? How do I fill this time?*

From Rev. Cynthia Huling Hummel; revchh@hotmail.com)

Since the pandemic started, I've been having fun preaching every Sunday on Facebook Live. Who knew that being a televangelist could be so much fun. LOL! I also enjoy leading hymn sings and kids sing-alongs for the Lyons Presbyterian Church on FBLive. My calling right now is to serve those living with Alzheimer's and other dementias. I completed my two years of service on the National Alzheimer's Council on Research, Care and Services representing the



5.8 million Americans living with dementia. I'm busy with two projects for the National Academies of Sciences, Medicine and Engineering. I'm also serving on the Alzheimer's Clinical Trials Consortium on the NIA Biomarker and Genetics sub-committee and its Nomenclature sub-committee. Locally, I lead a singing group for those living with dementia called "Faithful Friends. I am very interested in encouraging dementia friendly communities. On a personal note- I am in my 10th year in an Alzheimer's study. (Cynthia is a retired pastor dealing with Alzheimer's and an advocate for those wanting to find information or support; her email is above).

Please Share this Newsletter and Your Input

Think about your own history and please email your wisdom and experiences to me at stanton69@zoominternet.net. (Let me know whether to add your name and email, or to post yours anonymously).

Please use one of the categories above, or come up with more if you think it would be helpful! Please pass this along and invite other retired pastors to participate. Your feedback on how to improve this effort is welcomed.

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