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## FAMILIAR GRIEVANCES

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# "I Don't Like My Congregation's Worship Service."

Pastor W. Max Mons

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When I was a vicar a member of the congregation said to the pastor, "I don't like the worship service." The pastor shook his head, acknowledging that he had heard the statement, but he did not respond, at least not immediately. As I endured the silence I thought about how I would respond. The thoughts that came to my mind were, "Why don't you like it? What makes you say that? Can you be more specific?" When the pastor broke the silence he said, "Let me ask you a question. Do you know what worship is, what it does, what your role is, what God's role is?"

I quickly learned my thoughts were not my pastor's thoughts, but his insight was brilliant. So often we don't like something because we don't know enough about what it really is.

In his work, *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church*, Timothy H. Maschke, assists us in understanding what worship is, what it does, what your role is, and what God's role is. He does this by presenting the four dimensions of Lutheran worship, which are encounter, expression, education, and evangelism.

First and foremost, worship is an encounter with God, in which God is the chief actor. In this

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encounter, God does a twofold work. First, he confronts, accuses, and convicts us of our sins by means of the Law. As God does this we are brought to the point of saying, "I, a poor, miserable sinner." Second, God brings the good news that Christ Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose for us sinners and that because he did, we are forgiven. In the worship service, God brings this good news to us in concrete form by means of his Word and Sacraments. Through these means he fills us with his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The "encounter" highlights that, in the worship service, God is the giver and we are the receiver. This is the highest way to worship. It's also the opposite of what many people believe about worship.

Many people believe that worship is all about what we do for God, as if we are the chief actors, as if we are the givers, and God is the recipient. In the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, the Lutheran Confessions speak against this idea:

This is how God wants to become known and worshiped, namely, that we receive blessings from him, and indeed, that we receive them on account of his mercy and not on account of our merits.

Having received God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, we express our joy and thanks to God. Maschke calls this second dimension of worship

“expression.”

Expression takes place throughout the worship service. One shining example occurs during the Service of the Sacrament in the Divine Service. Through the Sacrament of the Altar we receive God’s gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. We express our thanks to God for the gifts given when we sing the post communion canticle: “Thank the Lord and sing his praise.”

A note of caution when considering the expression dimension of worship: All too often we can come to the conclusion that giving thanks and praise to God for the gifts received is our burdensome obligation. Such is not the case. Rather, we express our thanks and praise because we can’t help it. The gifts given to us in the worship service make us like children at Christmas who are filled with joy over the gifts received and cannot contain their thanks.

The next dimension of worship is “education.” In this dimension God instructs us by means of his Word as it is read, preached, and sung. Psalm 119:105 reminds us of this when it says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” The Sacraments are God’s Word that also instructs us. Take Holy Communion as an example. The Words of Institution teach us who instituted the meal (Jesus), when it was instituted (on the night he was betrayed), the nature of the elements (bread, wine, body, blood), what we are to do with the elements (eat and drink), the blessings of the meal (forgiveness of sins), and that the meal is done in remembrance of Jesus.

Martin Luther wrote about the educational dimension of worship: “[Liturgical worship practices] are essential, especially for the immature and the young who must be trained and educated in the Scripture and God’s Word daily, so that they may become familiar with the Bible, grounded, well versed, and skilled in it, ready to defend their faith and in due time to teach others and to increase the kingdom of Christ.” While Luther makes special reference to the immature and young, it is important

to remember that all Christians, young and old, newly converted and life-long believers, are in need of the Word that God gives in and through the worship service to sustain their faith.

The final dimension of worship is “evangelism.” Worship is a public confession of the faith. What we believe, teach, and confess should be made plain for two reasons. The first is so that the visitor to the worship service may hear our confession. The second is so that the believer may be strengthened in the faith and enabled to share God’s Word. Psalm 51:10-13 highlights this aspect of worship when it says:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

Note the order. In and through the worship service God cleanses our hearts by means of his Word and Sacraments. He restores our joy. With his work accomplished in us, we teach sinners his ways. That’s evangelism.

“So often we don’t like something because we don’t know enough about what it really is.” That was the pastor’s reply to the person who said, “I don’t like our worship service.” It is hoped that through this discussion of worship dimensions you come to a better understanding of the worship service and a greater appreciation for what it is and what God does through it. †

#### **For further reading:**

- A.L. Barry, “What About Lutheran Worship?”
- Timothy H. Maschke, *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church*
- Fred L. Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*
- Text, Music, Context: *A Resource for Reviewing Worship Materials*

# “I Don’t Like My Pastor”

Pastor Herbert Mueller III

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Your pastor is God’s gift to you and your church. God gives you a pastor so that he can preach and teach God’s Word, administer the Sacraments, visit the sick, and teach the young. Pastors are supposed to be good for you. Therefore, there is something disturbing going on when someone says, “I don’t like my pastor...” People usually say those five words because their pastor has done or said something that made them upset. In such cases it is important to distinguish the reasons for being upset with a pastor.

Some reasons for being upset with a pastor are legitimate. The apostle Paul tells young pastor Timothy what is required of a pastor in 1 Timothy chapter 3,

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, nor a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not

know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Paul admonishes pastor Titus in Titus chapter 1, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

Legitimate, scriptural reasons for being upset with a pastor would involve the teaching of false doctrine or the living of an immoral lifestyle. In such situations the pastor is doing more harm than good. He is blaspheming the name of Christ with his teaching or his life. These are serious issues. The first passage above, from 1 Timothy 3, speaks about the lifestyle an overseer, or pastor, is to maintain. The second passage from Titus 1 speaks of his teaching—what he is supposed to say in public about matters of Scripture, sin and grace. If a pastor is not living a moral lifestyle or if a pastor is not teaching sound doctrine, he needs to be admonished and called to repentance. If he does not repent, he should be removed. If he repents, forgiveness ought to be given. But in some cases, particularly with instances of immoral lifestyle, even a forgiven pastor can no

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longer be a pastor. This has nothing to do with whether or not the man is a likeable guy. It has to do with the damage that the proclamation of the Gospel would receive if the man guilty of notorious sin would continue in his office.

There is also the matter of failure in pastoral care. There are certain situations where a pastor may not be able to do everything his parishioners need. Health issues may intervene in a pastor's care for the flock the Good Shepherd has given to him. In these cases, the utmost care needs to be exhibited for both pastor and people. If possible, the brother pastors in the circuit should help the struggling brother with the care of his flock, as long as his illness precludes him from carrying out his duties. In the short term, this is not so much of an issue. However, in the long term it may not be possible for him to continue to be pastor because he cannot carry out the necessary duties.

When a perfectly healthy pastor has illegitimate reasons for failure in pastoral care it is a completely different matter. Either through laziness or through preoccupation with other matters, pastors may fail to discharge their duties in a timely fashion. Usually a kindly worded admonition would steer a pastor in the right direction. Repeated and deliberate failure in pastoral care is a serious matter.

Every pastor takes ordination vows that help us understand what a pastor is supposed to do:

**Question:** "Do you promise that you will perform the duties of your office in accordance with these Confessions [the three ecumenical creeds and the Book of Concord], and that all your preaching and teaching and your administration of the Sacraments will be in conformity with Holy Scripture and with these Confessions?"

**Answer:** "Yes, I promise, with the help of God."

**Question:** "Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine, will you forgive the sins of those

who repent, and will you promise never to divulge the sins confessed to you? Will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying, and will you demonstrate to the Church a constant and ready ministry centered in the Gospel? Will you admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and in holy living?"

**Answer:** "Yes, I will, with the help of God."

**Question:** "Finally, will you honor and adorn the Office of the Holy Ministry with a holy life? Will you be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the Confessions? And will you be constant in prayer for those under your pastoral care?"

**Answer:** "I will, the Lord helping me through the power and grace of His Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

When a pastor is doing what he has promised to do in these vows there is no legitimate scriptural reason for disliking a pastor.

Sometimes people find a pastor unlikeable because of his personality. Pastors are people too. They have the same rough edges as the rest of the human population. In such situations a pastor may be unlikable, but is still faithfully bringing Word and Sacrament to his flock. Truth be told, his likability as a person has very little to do with whether or not God can use him to bring His Word to the people. In extreme cases a pastor's likeability may hamper the proclamation of the Gospel. Such situations ought to be used as a reason for prayer, for both the pastor in question and the flock entrusted to his care.

Sometimes a pastor's work may be upsetting. This especially happens when a pastor rebukes or admonishes a parishioner to avoid or repent of sin. But this is exactly one of the reasons God gave pastors to the church. If you are in sin, living contrary to the Ten Commandments, it is the pastor's responsibility to

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<sup>1</sup>Lutheran Service Book Agenda, p. 166.

rebuke and admonish you. He would not be a good pastor if he allowed you to continue in your sin, thinking that you were just fine with God when you were not. If he would refuse to rebuke and admonish sin he would be guilty of a great sin himself. The Apostle Paul instructs young Pastor Timothy with the words:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

We must never forget that Satan despises the preaching of God's Word. Satan attacks pastors because they have the high responsibility of speaking God's Word publicly. Satan also seeks to make care for the flock a burdensome toil for a pastor by inciting a pastor's flock against him. We pray in the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." What does this mean? "God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory." Any situation where someone says, "I don't like my pastor" is an occasion to pray this prayer. †

# HELP FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO DON'T ATTEND CHURCH

Pastor Keith Brustuen

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It's heartbreaking. You prayed for him before he was born. You carried him to the Baptismal font. You put a Bible in her hand and let her read it for family devotions. You helped them learn the Catechism. You helped them learn the liturgy as they sat beside you in church. You spoke to them about keeping their promise at confirmation to "hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully."

And now they won't set foot in church anymore. Either they think they don't need forgiveness of their sins or they don't believe they need to go to church to receive it. You've pleaded, preached, and made rules that they won't follow. Your kids absolutely refuse to go to church. You may feel as if you can hear people talking to each other about your failure as a parent. Your conscience may bother you about how you have dealt with your child.

Be of good cheer, your heavenly Father is not mad at you. Paul announces, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). From the Psalmist we receive this wonderful release from the weight of sin: "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far

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does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:11-12).

Jesus died on the cross in the place of parents and children who by nature are turned against God. Jesus' "It is finished" from the cross means that Jesus has measured up to the Father's demands for you and paid for your sins completely. This is the confidence that we may have before God. Our salvation does not depend on how well we have done our duty as parents.

Nevertheless, we still must do our best to be a good father or mother. The way you go about your duties might differ depending on the circumstances. Let's say your child is young and dependent on you. Especially in these earlier years, your example goes a long way to teach children the importance and blessing of receiving the Lord's forgiveness of sin in Church.

We can't overemphasize the importance of giving a good example by faithfully attending church. This is especially true for fathers. In a June 2003 article from Touchstone magazine, Robbie Low reports some astonishing findings from a Swiss survey:

The question was asked to determine whether a person's religion carried through to the next generation, and if so, why, or if not, why not. The result is dynamite. There

is one critical factor. It is overwhelming, and it is this: It is the religious practice of the father of the family that, above all, determines the future attendance at or absence from church of the children.<sup>1</sup>

In short, if a father does not go to church, no matter how faithful his wife's devotions, only one child in 50 will become a regular worshipper. If a father does go regularly, regardless of the practice of the mother, between two-thirds and three-quarters of their children will become churchgoers (regular and irregular). If a father goes but irregularly to church, regardless of his wife's devotion, between a half and two-thirds of their offspring will find themselves coming to church regularly or occasionally.<sup>2</sup>

This quotation may make us feel guilty. But look at it positively: The Lord has given parents, and especially fathers, the opportunity to have a huge impact on their children just by how they live their life. Set a good example on Sunday morning and with daily devotions, and your children's way of thinking is likely to be tilted toward attending church, even if for a time they stay away.

One simple thing that parents can do to help their school age children is to limit the child's activities so that they have time and energy to go to church. Remember that your heavenly Father gives you the duty to parent. Whether you feel up to it or not, it is your job to make the tough call about your young child's schedule and priorities. Yes, this may result in conflict and temporary nastiness. But keeping your own mind set on things above, your life is hidden with God in Christ so that you are protected to face the anger that your child may express (Colossians 3:1-3). You have the authority and duty to arrange a schedule that does not conflict with church attendance. It is more important to receive spiritual nourishment

through the forgiveness of sins (which lasts forever) than being MVP of a sports team that plays for a short season of one's life. As Jesus said,

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:34-38).

When you limit activities and direct energy toward going to church, you are teaching your children two things: 1. How to keep the promise they made or will make in Confirmation, to be regular and frequent at church and at the Lord's Table. 2. To keep their priorities focused on the Christian faith and to give up things which may not be bad in themselves but would keep them from hearing God's Word.

Now let's say that your child is an adult. They are no longer under your roof. They may have families of their own. You still have your vocation as parent, although the way you serve in that capacity is greatly adjusted. It would be wrong to try to force behavior by threatening to withhold love or inheritance unless they go to church. As tempting as it may be, the Gospel is never something that God crams down our throats.

Maintain your personal relationship with your child. Let them see God's unconditional love in you. Remember how you used to have those talks? "I love you so much that if the house were on fire and you were trapped inside, I would crawl back in to save you. Nothing you can do will make me stop loving you." Now is when you get to show them

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-024-v#ixzz30F57JqLg>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-024-v#ixzz30F5xVwgY>

that steadfast love and faithfulness.

Faithfulness means intervention. If you were headed for danger, would you like to be warned? Drawing someone's attention to their peril is certainly a loving thing to do. When they were a toddler you wouldn't think twice about interrupting their walk into the street. Why would you hesitate to warn them about the spiritual deadliness of not hearing God's Word and receiving His forgiveness at church? Jude urges us to "save others by snatching them out of the fire" (v.22a).

In his helpful book, *What they Need to Hear: Sharing Christ with Family and Friends*, Klemet Preus made the following observations :

Evangelists speak to one person often. Evangelists answer questions. Evangelists know that they work better in an environment of trust. No matter how unpleasant, true evangelists will always correct false doctrine when necessary. Risky as it may seem, evangelists learn to speak the Law. Evangelists learn to speak what they know of Christ in a variety of ways.<sup>3</sup>

You get to be an evangelist to your child. As you taught them Luther's Small Catechism and "Now I lay me down to sleep," so you now get to keep on working in their lives, proclaiming God's Word as the Holy Spirit gives you openings.

A person who is not coming to church needs to hear that all is not well. A patient with stage 4 cancer needs to be made aware of his fatal condition. The doctor isn't going to make the patient more sick by pointing out the death raging in their body. In the same way, stop letting Satan convince you to be careful "not to drive them away." If they're not coming to church, they've already left. Staying away from the Word and Sacraments is not a neutral thing. If you are not feeding your body, it is starving to death. If you are not feeding your soul the pure milk of God's Word, your faith is starving to death. It's as urgent as whisking a toddler out of a busy street.

Whether your child is young, old, or anywhere in between, something you can always do for your child is to pray. Look at Mark 2:1-12. Jesus was teaching in a house that was crammed full of people. Four men brought a paralyzed man to Jesus, letting him down in front of Jesus through the roof. Mark records that Jesus forgave the paralytic and healed him. Their bringing their friend into the presence of Jesus was a form of prayer.

Dr. John Kleinig applies this situation to someone whose friend or loved one does not go to church. They are spiritually crippled. They need forgiveness and healing. When you are at home or when you are at church, you can bring your child to Jesus in prayer. On your way up to the Communion rail for the forgiveness of your own sins, you can also make a shopping list of people who need Jesus' forgiveness and care. As if they are riding in your arms, you can bring them up and lay them at Jesus' feet so that He can deal kindly with them.<sup>4</sup>

Initial responses to discussions with your child may well be negative. But don't despair or give up! Keep on praying and keep on evangelizing as you keep on loving unconditionally. Take heart in the fact that the Lord hears your prayer because Jesus has atoned for your sin and your child's sin. Be encouraged by the fact that God uses Baptism and His Word to lead to repentance and trust in Jesus. Leave the progress and results in the Lord's merciful and capable hands. Since Jesus has risen from the dead, your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15).

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).†

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<sup>3</sup> *What They Need to Hear: Sharing Christ with Family and Friends*, p. 8-9. This helpful book contains a series of letters written to make the case for Christ to a friend dying of cancer.

<sup>4</sup> John Kleinig, Camp Arcadia Bible Studies Thursday 18 August 4. Bringing Others to Jesus in Prayer, emailed document