

Sunday, April 13, 2008, Easter 4A  
Cross+Road Lutheran Church , O.P., FL

## OUR NEW ASSOCIATE SHEPHERD

So next week we'll be officially meeting Jon Fredrickson, the person our council is recommending to the congregation to be called as associate pastor. By means of preparation, I thought I might talk a little **bit about pastors today**. This Sunday is traditionally observed as Good Shepherd Sunday, and often pastors are referred to as the shepherds of their flocks; so I thought no better time than now.

People bring lots of expectations with them about pastors. The one or ones you grew up with when you were younger may have already set your template as to what a good pastor should do. Or, maybe you have experienced a bad pastor along the way, so you automatically associate anything a new pastor does that reminds of the old one as a bad sign. Some people visit a thriving church somewhere or compare notes with a friend about what their pastor does and automatically assume that this is what a pastor should do. And if you are honest with yourself, you already have a set of expectations for the pastor we are hoping to call. Add to that the fact that we've decided to search for a pastor who will specifically develop our youth and family programming in addition to other duties around here. You may have visions of some pied-piper with magical skills that kids of all ages will flock to. You may have expectations of what our youth and family programming will look like based on all sorts of assumptions. And if any of these things are true, you are bound to be disappointed because what one human could meet all of those expectations? So I thought we should talk some about this new adventure we could be embarking on.

**Pastors are lots of things.** There are the obvious roles people may think of: pastors are preachers and worship leaders. You can always find us here on Sundays. We lead the congregation through the worship service and we preach. This is simply one of our roles. Some say it's the most important thing we do and *the* thing we must be good at. I, too, believe that pastors must be good preachers, and I certainly think Pastor Fredrickson is one of them. But, there are people out there who faithfully, week after week, tolerate poor preaching. Which says to me that preaching must not be their priority. A pastor is something else to them besides a preacher. And I agree with that, too. There is more to this role of pastor than simply showing up on Sunday mornings and preaching. That would be an easy job.

For some people, the relationship end of things is far more important to them in a pastor. Some want that soothing presence a pastor can bring when they are nervous before surgery and he or she comes to have a prayer with them beforehand. That is, if the parishoner lets the pastor know he or she is having surgery. Yes, that's a guilt trip for I'm using on some of you. Some people value more the presence of the pastor when a loved one has died. And even more than the words of comfort a pastor may have to offer, it's just about the being there. In fact, this is one part of the job that more often moves me to tears. That you would invite me into your homes and lives for such intimate moments, like a baptism or a funeral. Or that you would invite me in a graduation or a return home from serving overseas. That you'd want me there when you turn fifty or when you move into a new home. Those are the times when I am humbled to be pastor. And certainly Pastor Fredrickson appears to be a person who does presence well, who knows how to simply be with people.

Still others think of their pastor as teacher—he or she is the one they learned so much from about the Bible and about God. The pastor is the one who always teaches confirmation, they think. The pastor is the one who should teach the adult Sunday school class. The pastor should be at the heart of Vacation Bible School. Some think of their pastor as counselor—he or she is the one to go to when the marriage is in trouble. Or the kid just got arrested. Or it may be time for a job change but one isn't sure what to do. The pastor is called in at times of crisis to help sort out the feelings of what just happened. The pastor becomes a spiritual component of a person recovering from addiction. Both of these roles can be important pieces of a pastor's identity.

But there are other roles pastors play that may not always come to mind. Pastors are the chief development officers of the congregation. That's code for they talk about money. Lots of people think we shouldn't—at least not too often. But the electric company doesn't accept smiles as payment. Staff tend not to work for chickens. Youth don't flock to churches to watch the grass grow. You may not like it, but part of my role is to be constantly lifting up to you our needs for your support—your financial support, your volunteer support, your vocal support. Part of my job is to make sure we don't get too comfortable with where we are. There is always another goal we are striving toward. There are always service areas that need more people volunteering. There is always some program that requires more money. And the pastor, like it or not, is tied up in development.

Pastors are also social commentators and the really courageous ones of us are activists. Lutherans don't like it much, but from the time of the Old Testament through Jesus' ministry on into recent history, the church has something to say about politics and justice issues and current events. The old tag line from seminary faculty was that a preacher should have the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. We have an obligation as pastors to talk about and preach about the world around us, because God so loved the world that he gave his only son. God has an investment in this world as well as the next. You, the church, don't exist in a vacuum. You are citizens of countries, members of communities, and your Christian faith is supposed to engage these surroundings, and by your actions this world is supposed to look more like the Kingdom of God. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. If I don't challenge you on your Kingdom citizenship in the midst of your American citizenship, I am not doing my job. And it's a whole lot bigger than FOX news, CNN, or the Times-Union, bigger than conservative or liberal, bigger than mainline or evangelicals.

There are social injustices all around us, and too often The Church has played deaf to their cries. For the prophets of old who railed against Israel about their treatment of the poor and widows, for Jesus who ate with outcasts and brought healing to untouchables, a church not engaged in social needs must look ridiculous. Pastors have a prophetic role to make us uncomfortable and to stir us to action. Its part of our calling to live as baptized Christians in the world.

**So we've decided to add** another one of these characters we call pastors. Another shepherd around here to live out these pieces wrapped up into one job. This will be a learning curve for all of us. Because the talented person the council is putting before you for your consideration will do things differently than the one you've had for the last ten years. He'll have different strengths and weaknesses than this one. He'll have new ideas and new passions. And I hope we're ready for that.

We aren't looking for a program director. If what you're looking for is an activities coordinator to play with the kids around here, you'll be disappointed. Because we're bringing in a canon not a squirt gun. A pastor for youth and family will certain generate programming, but he cannot be the program. We've decided to bring in a pastor to help us—by all the various roles he'll have—to help us do youth and family ministry. You aren't getting out of any work by doing this; in fact, you're probably creating more work. Because another pastor will recruit you to help, challenge you to serve, bug you to fund, push you to grow. He'll be further developing us to live out our mission in the world, especially with emphasis as to how youth and families do this.

As with your current one, you aren't calling a friend. You don't hire friends. At least, I hope you don't. That'd be like tying a pork chop around the neck of the ugly kid just to get the dog to play with him. Even though it is my tendency to relate to all of you as friends, ethically I have to remind myself that you didn't hire me to be your friend; you hired me to be your pastor. So there are times when we have difficult things to say to each other, times when I am bound to lead in such a way that it benefits the whole flock not just a couple of sheep, times when honesty supersedes polite social etiquette between friends. Calling an associate pastor means calling another shepherd to help manage the flock, to keep the flock safe, to keep the flock vibrant and growing, to keep the flock following the right master.

In our conversations and interviews, the one thing I stressed to Pastor Fredrickson was my primary hope for our youth and family pastor. I want this person to be constantly struggling with this question: from the time we baptize a baby until that child graduates, what will they come to know about Jesus because of us—because of Cross+Road? What does a graduate of Cross+Road's youth and family ministry look like, and how is that graduate different from kids who never attended a church? What seeds will be planted because of us? And my expectation is that whoever this pastor is will keep that question in front of all of us—will keep all of us accountable to teaching the faith to those around us.

When it comes down to it, any one of us pastors is really an associate shepherd. The master's voice we want you to **here is not ours but Jesus'**. Our job is always about Jesus' voice. We want you to know it and listen for him to call you and guide you. Our question is always how is the flock different because, maybe through me or maybe in spite of me, the flock heard Jesus? And that's not a program question. That's a relationship question. Because unless you know The Good Shepherd, you won't know his voice. We associate shepherds at best keep you near Jesus, keep you in a position of relationship with him, so that you can hear him.

An international gathering of youth met for a full week to discuss how better to promulgate Christ's message to the world. Those assembled for the conference read many informative essays, heard many fine speakers, watched a few videos, and had ample time to discuss with each other. As the conference was beginning to break up and those attending were packing to leave, a young woman from East Africa arose and said, "In my country when we hear that a pagan village is ready to accept the Gospel we don't send books, videos, a Bible or even an evangelist. Rather we send the best Christian family we can find because we have found that

the example of a good family speaks louder and more clearly than all the books, speeches, and videos in the world."

Not only for just our youth and their families, but for all of us—could Jesus' voice come loudly through us? Not because of some amazing program, not because of some silver bullet an activities director brought us; but because of our witness? Because of our presence with someone, would they hear the Shepherd's voice?