

DOESN'T THE CHURCH WANT ME ANYMORE? Sociological and Ecclesiastical Barriers to Re-entering the Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

It was the 1985 General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene in Anaheim, California. General Superintendent V.H. Lewis had been voted to retirement status and the title of General Superintendent Emeritus. He had finished his last session in the chair at the assembly. As the assembly adjourned for the afternoon, Dr. Lewis tidied up his things at the desk and after speaking with a number of well-wishers, he excused himself to step outside where he would be picked up by the V.I.P. van and driven back to his hotel to prepare for the evening.

The wait for the van turned out to be much longer than expected. He knew he was at the appointed place because he had met the van there numerous times already. So he stood and waited, and waited, and waited. The

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van never showed up and Dr. Lewis was left to fend for himself in getting back to his hotel.

How ironic that an international leader in the Church of the Nazarene with something like 30 years of service in the highest elected office in the denomination would be forgotten for something as simple as a ride to the hotel. With his wry sense of humor Dr. Lewis was heard to have remarked something along the lines of this: "I guess when you retire, they forget about you rather quickly!"

Whether or not this story is true is actually unknown to me, though I heard it repeated a number of times in the years following that General Assembly. However, there is another story that I heard directly from a retired General Superintendent. This individual told me with a broken heart that after his retirement it was a full year before he received the first phone call to inquire about his thoughts or opinions or willingness to speak in the church he had served for half a century.

How quickly does the Church of the Nazarene move on after a significant leader steps out of office? A retired former superintendent of a southern district told me that he became acutely aware of his lack of importance to the church after he stepped down from the superintendency. "All it took was 30 days from the time I left [the district office until I arrived in another state] to help my son plant a church, and I was out of touch, totally forgotten."

During my years as a district superintendent I spoke to a number of retired colleagues, all of whom echoed the same sentiment. It doesn't take long for the church to move on without the newly retired leader.

The focus of this conference, however, is not on the subject of life after retirement for Nazarene elders, whether they be retired from the pastorate, missionary service, evangelism, or the administrative levels. Rather, this conference has chosen to focus on clergy attrition prior to retirement. Nonetheless, the stories recounted above have been repeated over and over among clergy who have stepped aside from active roles in ministry prior to retirement. It doesn't take long to be forgotten by the church.

The title for this paper immediately reveals the pathos with which I approach the subject of clergy attrition prior to retirement. I am one of those clergy whose status is officially listed by the denomination as "Unassigned." Allow me to briefly recount my clergy history as a means of positioning myself for what I offer as a reflective white paper. Indulge me for a moment that may at first appear to be quite ego driven, because I want to make a point that is germane to this paper.

In 1977 I graduated from a Nazarene college and immediately entered the ministry. My first district license was granted on the Intermountain District and I was ordained on the Kansas City District in 1982. The clergy roles in which I have served include Pastoral Service (associate), Pastor, District Superintendent, and Specialized Assignment (interdenominational). In addition to these officially designated roles, I have had the privilege of guest preaching in

churches, camps and missions conventions on 26 different districts in North America and two foreign countries. As would be expected of a person with my history, I've served as an elected or ex officio member of just about every board and committee the church has conceived, with the exception of the Women's Ministries Council. Academically, I earned a B.A. in Religion, an M.A. in Organizational Communication, and a Ph.D. in Religion. My doctoral research examined organizational renewal in religious organizations and my dissertation included case studies on renewal efforts on the Oregon Pacific and Canada Central Districts. The list of awards given to me is substantial, including being recognized by the Government of Canada for my leadership in crisis intervention during the Ice Storm of 1998.

On the surface it seems to be a fairly impressive résumé, and one might be inclined to ask, "So why is he not in the ministry?" That is a question that haunts me almost daily, and certainly every Sunday. What happened?

Without going into detail, my departure from ministry is the result of two forced resignations. In the first, I had left the superintendency to pastor a church that unbeknownst to me had been in a power struggle for a number of years. After 18 months of grappling to manage the conflict in which there were mistakes on all sides, mine included, the district superintendent and advisory board forced me to resign. After a period of three and a half years in which I carved out a campus ministry at a state university, I was recruited to serve as the executive pastor and ministry coordinator at one of our largest and best known churches. Five months later I was terminated for reasons that have never been explained

despite my repeated requests for answers. Further, in both public and private settings, the statement has been made that there is no place of ministry for which I can be approved while on my current district. It would be difficult to arrive at any other conclusion than that I am not just unassigned, I am clearly not wanted.

Now before you dismiss me as simply feeling sorry for myself and looking for sympathy, or as a hurting individual seeking to lash out at someone, I would humbly ask that you hear me out. Though it is true that I speak from deep personal pain, it is not my intent to merely engage in cathartic venting. Rather, I still firmly believe that God can bring beauty from ashes, lessons from suffering, and pathways toward restoration discovered only in the valley of grief.

The problem which this paper seeks to address is this: The Church of the Nazarene does not have an effective pathway for involuntarily unassigned clergy to re-enter the ministry and thus the cost in terms of personal devaluation and lost opportunity for the organization is unconscionable.

Ah, but is it appropriate for one such as I to be given voice on a topic such as this? Is it possible to step back from one's own organization and offer an objective critique? Smelser (1963) suggests in this book Theory of collective behavior that indeed, members of an organization can provide effective self-examination. In fact, it is essential that an organization seek critiques from both within as well as from informed observers on the outside. It is from the position of an insider that I present this reflection and a proposal for change. And it should be noted that I am still lovingly committed to the church, hopeful that the church will continue to be a learning organization, and praying that somehow I

may be afforded the privilege of positively contributing to the ongoing renewal of the church.

In this paper the subject of consideration has been limited to an examination of ordained clergy who are involuntarily unassigned. The paper does not address those who leave the ministry voluntarily or as a result of an ecclesiastical action. And while anecdotal evidence is utilized throughout, there has been no attempt at formal surveys, interviews, or other scientific studies that would quantify the findings. The financial and emotional cost of such research has simply been beyond my meager means as I have struggled to survive the last 15 months. The paper includes recommendations for policy change that would classify it as a white paper. It is thus being presented as a reflective white paper.

For the purposes of this paper, the terms clergy, minister, and pastor refer to ordained Elders in the Church of the Nazarene. There is no attempt to include ordained Deacons in the discussion of this paper, though it would be logical to assume that those individuals will have experiences similar to that of the Elder group. The term “ministry” refers to any of the officially recognized vocational assignments in the Church of the Nazarene, whether full or part time.² The stakeholders to which this paper is addressed include all clergy (assigned and

² The author is indebted to Ian Robertson for his insightful observation that a distinction should be drawn between “ministry” as a generalized activity and “the ministry” as a clergy designation. All Christians are collectively and individually engaged in ministry for the good of all mankind. Certain individuals are designated by religious organizations, i.e. the church, to engage in ministry vocations for which there are specific designations. It is the latter group to which this paper makes reference as being in “ministry.”

unassigned), the administrative officers of the church at district and denominational levels, and local churches across North America.

The paper has been organized in the following way. The introduction provides the position from which the paper is written, the problem statement, as well as the scope and limitations of the paper. Section two presents an overview of why persons may leave the active ministry and draws some conclusions about social responses. In section three the paper evaluates the personal and organizational costs that are associated with the decision to terminate ministry. The fourth section addresses the notion of accountability and a pathway by which unassigned clergy may be supported in their efforts to re-enter the ministry. The point here is to suggest ways in which the sociological and ecclesiastical barriers to re-entry may be removed.

WHY LEAVE, AND IS IT SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE?

A number of reasons may be posited for why an individual would leave the ministry, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. For example, the elder may come to the conclusion that he/she is unsuited for ministry or has been released from the Divine call of ministry. A loss of health, whether on the part of the elder or a member of the elder's family, may be sufficient reason to step aside from active ministry. While there may be deep disappointment with such circumstances that would cause a minister to step aside, social stigmas are not typically associated with these departures. It has been this author's observation that the clergy in this group are typically welcomed into the fellowship of a local congregation and where appropriate are seen as a valuable resource whose training and

experience will be a benefit to the church. Thus it is socially acceptable to leave the ministry for these reasons.

Moral failure on the part of a minister is a different matter. It usually results in ecclesiastical action that removes the pastor from all public ministries for a stated period of time.³ The failure may be of a sexual nature, financial misconduct, theological error, or abuse of persons, substances, or authority. The Church of the Nazarene has developed a pathway to re-enter the ministry for all those guilty of the abovementioned transgressions, with the exceptions of sexual misconduct involving children, homosexual behavior, and repeated marital infidelity.⁴ This author has observed that a few pastors with these failures in their past are treated with compassion and sympathy, the exception being child abuse and homosexuality.⁵ The message of one church board to me as their district superintendent regarding the re-entry of a pastor was stated thus: “We feel like

³ “437.6. A member of the clergy who is not in good standing shall not preach, teach a Sunday School/Bible study/small group class, or hold any other position of trust or authority in the church or worship services, and shall not be given any ministerial role unless the District Advisory Board, the Ministerial Credentials Board, the district superintendent, and the general superintendent in jurisdiction determine that the individual has made sufficient progress toward rehabilitation to warrant once again allowing the individual to be of service in a position of trust or authority. Those considering approval shall carefully consider whether or not the individual who has lost good standing has appropriately repented of his or her misconduct. True repentance involves a deep sense of personal guilt coupled with a change of conduct which continues for a length of time sufficient to be evidence that the change is likely to be permanent. Approval to serve in a position of trust or authority may be granted with or without restrictions. (505.1-5.2, 505.5, 505.11-5.12)” (Manual, Church of the Nazarene, 2009-2013).

⁴ “437.8. Because some types of misconduct, such as sexual misconduct involving children or of a homosexual nature, or repeated marital infidelity, are rarely the result of a onetime moral lapse, individuals who are guilty of sexual misconduct that involves a high probability of repeated misconduct should not be restored to good standing. These individuals also should not be permitted to serve in any position of leadership, trust, or ministry in the local church. (505.1-5.2, 505.5, 505.11-5.12).” Ibid.

⁵ The notions of compassion and sympathy are quite foreign to many who depart ministry due to sexual misconduct. As one anonymous former pastor reported, he and the majority of his colleagues in a similar situation find they are treated with “a default shame-based isolation and alienation.” This individual went on to say “I know of a few and only a few who would witness to compassion and welcome.” This issue also needs to be addressed in the interest of both our theology in the Church of the Nazarene as well as redeeming lost opportunity.

we can relate to this pastor because he has failed just like we have.” That board extended a unanimous call to the pastor and opened the way for his re-entry to the ministry. The result of such organizational behavior is to support the notion that moral failure is somewhat socially acceptable and the church will provide the needed support for re-entry.

Unmanaged conflict resulting in the termination of ministry is yet another category altogether. In some cases the termination is forced as a result of official action or a required resignation in lieu of official action. Within the past three years I have personally observed several instances in which an elder was given the option of resignation or official dismissal due to unmanaged conflict in the ministry assignment. On the other hand, other ministers may opt to give up the fight over unmanaged conflict and simply quit. They may or may not have attempted relocation to another ministry position. Regardless, they are now out of the ministry, officially listed as “Unassigned,” and must find some other employment and means of personal financial support.

Kenneth Crow found that fully one-third of active pastors not serving in their first assignment have been officially classified as unassigned somewhere in their ministerial career (1996). These periods outside the assigned clergy roles may be for a number of reasons, many of which are quite legitimate. However, Crow further discusses the social stigma associated with being unassigned and calls it “unfair” (p. 17). The common wisdom of the church has been repeated over and over: Never resign from one assignment until you have someplace else to go. Once an individual is out of the ministry it is much harder to get back in.

There is no pathway established in the Church of the Nazarene for unassigned persons to re-enter the ministry. David McClung pointed out to this author that the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene requires that the districts have a plan of rehabilitation for a pastor who has left ministry due to misconduct, but has no provision for the rehabilitation of a pastor who is unassigned without misconduct (Personal correspondence via e-mail, March 22, 2010). A former general superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene said to me on several occasions that if an individual expresses a call to ministry and fulfills the church's requirements for placement, then the church is obligated to find that individual a place of ministry. The fact of the matter is that the Church of the Nazarene has never constructed the mechanism for the involuntarily unassigned to re-enter the ministry.

Further, clergy terminating ministry on account of unmanaged conflict typically experience an immediate cessation of communication and contact with former superiors, colleagues and friends in the ministry. The phone calls and interactions with persons with whom they have associated just abruptly stop. They are generally excluded from all activities and events that provided social networking and support. They no longer can afford to attend denominational events at their own expense even if they were invited, which in most cases they are not. In my own case, I have become painfully aware that friendship among clergy is task oriented. If two people in ministry don't have a common task that gives them reason to be together, the friendship simply dissipates.

The suspicion with which the unassigned are greeted when they seek to find a church with which to affiliate until reassignment is also a social barrier difficult to overcome. The length of time it takes for unassigned clergy to be asked to perform some function of ministry in the local church, at whatever level, is sufficient to communicate some sort of fear that the unassigned may have less than pure motives. The unspoken question on the part of other ministers as well as laypersons is this: "What's wrong with you that you couldn't pastor that church? And are you here now to try and take over?" From all this it may be concluded that unmanaged conflict resulting in a termination of ministry is socially unacceptable in the Church of the Nazarene. No wonder it is hard to get back in even though at one time the denomination officially recognized gifts and graces for ministry as well as a Divine call to a lifetime of service as a vocational minister.

THE COSTS OF EXCLUSION

Let's remind ourselves of what it took to get a person ordained in the first place. There is no attempt here to provide an exhaustive list, only a sampling.

The minister must complete four years of expensive education. It is expensive financially as well as in terms of the human resources required to support the education system in the Church of the Nazarene. Again, Kenneth Crow has demonstrated that the majority of Nazarene clergy in North America have received some or all of their training at a Nazarene institution of higher learning (2006). Those institutions are expensive to own and operate as can be seen by a review of their annual budgets. Further, there is a significant corps of

individuals serving at local, district, regional and national levels whose work is devoted to facilitating and supporting clergy training. Not only that, the training of a minister requires considerable human effort and sacrifice on the part of the minister's family.

Go a step further. The ordination process requires 2-4 years of service, depending on the ministry assignment. That is expensive in terms of delayed productivity while "learning the ropes," moving expenses paid by the local church, as well as the human resources required to mentor and supervise new recruits. Think of all the time and money expended for the District Board of Ministry and the Ministerial Studies Board to do their work. Then there is the time, money and effort invested by the district superintendent and a mentoring pastor—time and money and effort that perhaps could have been invested elsewhere. That 2-4 year period of apprenticeship is expensive.

And let us not forget the costs associated with the ordination service and producing that certificate to be framed and proudly displayed on the wall. District assemblies are costly and they require enormous amounts of human resource capital. There is support from Nazarene Headquarters as well as the obligatory presence of a general superintendent.

The point here is that the investment in ordination is enormous. As stated above, I have not attempted an exhaustive list. A top executive at Nazarene Headquarters told me several years ago that the World Mission Department of the Church of the Nazarene invests an additional \$100,000 to place a missionary

on the field. Without doubt, the Church of the Nazarene spends a lot in finances and human resources to get people in position to serve as ordained Elders.

So then what happens to that investment when a minister is terminated from ministry as a result of unmanaged conflict? Does not the cost continue escalating? Indeed it does!

Right at the top is the cost to the individual who finds that she/he is now unassigned. In addition to the emotional and financial cost of reorientation outside the ministry, there is a spiritual cost as well. Deep, faith shaking questions are raised concerning one's relationship with the church. Satan is sure to raise theological questions and questions about one's call to the ministry, even to the point of challenging one's Christian experience. We cannot glibly separate the minister's spirituality and his/her identity as a minister. And I haven't even touched on the emotional, financial and spiritual cost to the minister's spouse and children. In many cases, the spouse and children have already suffered significantly in the unmanaged conflict. Once the pastor is no longer a pastor, in many cases the burden increases on the family. All this raises the question as to whether the Church of the Nazarene offers better support to our laypeople that lose a job than it does its clergy in whom it has invested so much.

And what about the cost of lost opportunity for the church? I am personally aware of seven ordained elders who are out of the ministry as a result of unmanaged conflict, who collectively represent more than 205 years of experience, and all of whom at one time served churches ranging in size from 200 to 950 in average attendance. Although two of them were at or near

retirement age at the time they terminated their ministry, it was an issue of unmanaged conflict, not age, which motivated their decision to resign. And all seven are from one district! As of today, five of the seven are not even worshipping in a Nazarene Church. They are contributing their gifts and resources in other denominations. Are they still finding ways to minister?⁶ Of course! Not only are they fulfilling the role of all Christians to do good in the name of Christ to all persons everywhere, when possible, they are also guest preaching, advising, and in other ways fulfilling their call to vocational ministry. As one pastor in another denomination said to me, “I answered God’s call to the ministry 45 years ago and God has not uncalled me. So I find ways to be a minister.” However, the point here is that in the case of the seven pastors referenced above, their individual and collective wisdom, experience and expertise is being lost to the Church of the Nazarene.

What we, the Church of the Nazarene, are doing to these pastors individually and what we are doing to ourselves collectively is an unconscionable waste of resources. Further, it runs contrary to what we teach and believe about searching for the lost sheep and restoring the fallen regardless of why they are lost or have fallen. But that is the subject for another paper.

PATHWAYS OF RE-ENTRY

Periods of deep grief, lost resources, and unsettling change in one’s identity can be opportunities for rich learning and personal growth. That has

⁶ These individuals are examples of the distinction drawn earlier in this paper between the general activity of ministry as contrasted with designated vocational ministry. The pastors referenced are all engaging in various forms of Christian ministry. However, they are no longer pastoring and as such do not have the official sanction of the Church of the Nazarene for that clergy role.

been the case for me in what I have called my “odyssey of exile.” Throughout my two periods of involuntary status as unassigned I have learned some things about myself, about my church, and about life outside the ministry. It is from these learnings that I want to propose some practical pathways by which the involuntarily unassigned may be given opportunity to re-enter the ministry. These ideas are not presented in any sort of rank order.

Although the Church of the Nazarene was founded in part as a reform from the Methodist’s episcopal form of government, with the bishop having the power to appoint clergy, we have evolved in our organizational practices to where the district superintendent is very much the gatekeeper in clergy placement. The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene gives the district superintendent the authority to approve all clergy assignments and the process for appealing the decision of the district superintendent is so arduous as to make it appear to be more trouble than it is worth. Having been a district superintendent for nine years, and then working through the process to return to pastoral ministry, I am keenly aware of how much influence the district superintendent has in clergy placement. Not only does the district superintendent have the final say within the confines of her/his own district, I have nine years of experience in the unofficial system of recommendations for clergy placement across district lines.

Much of the time our system of placing pastors has worked reasonably well. Again, from my own experience, I have observed the care and passion of the majority of our district superintendents in seeking God’s direction to properly

match congregations with the right pastors. As is typical with all organizations, it is only when something goes wrong that new policies are enacted to avoid problems in the future. The problem of involuntarily unassigned clergy is what causes us to consider changes in the way we do our business as a church.

So what can be done to address this problem of the involuntarily unassigned clergy without just heaping more obligations on the shoulders of district superintendents whose current job descriptions have become virtually unmanageable? That is a formidable challenge, wouldn't you say?

Let me get into it this way. After three months of debilitating grief and depression, a friend suggested I get my real estate broker's license and start selling real estate. It was just the suggestion I needed. It gave me a reason to get up out of bed, get dressed, and start thinking about something besides my lost ministry.

My journey in real estate has introduced me to a whole new world and the trip has been rewarding. A multitude of dynamic, interesting and delightful people has come into my life. And the characteristic I have observed in all the top producers is this: accountability. Quite honestly, I've never witnessed anything like it in all my life. They hold themselves accountable and they all participate in some kind of an accountability group. And this isn't a gentle form of take it or leave it, wink/wink, nudge/nudge accountability. No, this is in your face with penetrating questions. Somehow I think they may have gotten the idea from John Wesley's class meetings. It is serious business!

As I have investigated and submitted myself to this level of accountability, I have learned that it applies to every dimension of life. Included are such things as attitude management, financial management, time management, priority management, family and leisure time management, not to mention accountability for production numbers and what segment of the market will best suit their purposes. And why do these top producers submit themselves to such intense scrutiny? I can tell you it is not because of the money, even though money does flow from such accountability. No, each and every one of these top producers can clearly and succinctly articulate the BIG WHY that is the underlying motivation for everything they do. They have answered the question in concrete terms as to why they are in the real estate business. That BIG WHY is what motivates and directs them each and every day of their lives. For some it is a family WHY. For others it is a self-fulfillment WHY, or a goal-achievement WHY. Every one of my top producer friends has also made the connection that without accountability they will never reach their BIG WHY.

So what are some accountability structures that will help to dissolve the social and ecclesiastical barriers to re-entering the ministry for our target group?

I propose the following, and again, they are not in rank order.

1. The orientation of new district superintendents needs to be reformed through expanded training.

A tour of the Global Ministry Center, Nazarene Publishing House, and a thick notebook of policies and procedures is hardly an appropriate orientation to the duties, responsibilities and expectations of the district superintendent. And in

terms of training, well, unless something has changed in the recent past, there really is none for new superintendents. The Board of General Superintendents, along with the General Secretary, the Director of Canada/USA Mission Evangelism and the Director of Pastoral Ministries all need to get involved in providing an orientation and training exercise that will make a difference in the lives and leadership of district superintendents.⁷

The curriculum for the training program should include exercises in self-discovery, the mission and ministry of the district superintendency, and articulating a BIG WHY. Priorities and accountability strategies should be set in place as a result of this boot camp-like experience.

District superintendents also need training for their administrative responsibilities, their role in placing pastors in local churches, their role and function as ex officio member and/or chair of district boards and committees, and their relationship to regional and denominational structures. Oh, and let us not forget that extensive travel is an expected component of the district superintendent's job description. Thus it behooves the church to provide initial and on-going training for the women and men of this office in the areas of maintaining positive family and social relationships, purity on a spiritual and moral level, and a healthy lifestyle.

Further, strategies for dealing with clergy fallout must also be put in place. As eloquently stated by Dr. Ron Benefiel (1986, 1990) in two papers presented at

⁷ A valuable resource for both the content and facilitation of a training program is the corps of retired district superintendents. Further, they could provide the Church of the Nazarene with an immeasurable service by serving as mentors and accountability partners for new district superintendents.

this conference, conflict is an inevitable component in church life. Much attention has been given to strategies for dealing with congregations in conflict, but too little attention has been given to strategies that would help district superintendents deal specifically with the clergy who have been displaced as a result of church conflict.

Why do I suggest this topic needs to be prioritized in the training of new district superintendents? I remember clearly the case of one new district superintendent whose first official day on the job included a board meeting in which a special review of the pastor was being conducted. The pastor narrowly survived the recall vote of the board, but did not survive the board's appeal to the District Advisory Board to declare the church in crisis and remove the pastor. It was a scenario for which the new district superintendent was totally unprepared. I know the situation well because the pastor in question was me. The Church of the Nazarene needs to hold itself accountable for the disservice it is doing to district superintendents and pastors who are facing unmanaged conflict.

2. A system needs to be created in which the district superintendent, District Advisory Board, and the District Board of Ministry are held accountable for the care and nurture of unassigned clergy.

It is not enough that unassigned clergy are required to send an annual report to the district assembly and that it is duly recorded by the district secretary. In the same way that mentors are assigned to new recruits entering the ministry,⁸ so also the unassigned need to be in the care and mentorship of district

⁸ Cf. footnote 5 for a suggestion regarding the mentoring of new district superintendents that harmonizes with the existing strategy for mentoring new recruits in the ministry.

leadership. The relationships and bonds created by such involvement with the unassigned will provide a basis for dissolving barriers, discovering untapped talents, and opening pathways for a return to ministry.

The District Board of Ministry could be a very important ally in creating a perception that the role of district leadership is not just to assess, as in evaluating the gifts, graces and call of new recruits, but also to advocate on the part of any credentialed minister experiencing any dimension of trouble. For the involuntarily unassigned, there is a profound need for someone to step up in the role of a Barnabas advocating on the part of Paul whose prior experiences ostracized him from the fellowship of the church. The District Board of Ministry could be a great key to creating lines of support, and giving wise counsel that has no sense of higher authority to it, i.e. peer to peer.

I have personal experience, both as a district superintendent and then again as a pastor, in which the pastor/superintendent relationship was strained to the point in which no useful communication was possible for a period of time. The district superintendent has often been in the unfortunate position of decision-maker that is viewed by the pastor as negatively impacting the conflict management process. Thus it is unreasonable to demand that the superintendent do all the mentoring. The District Advisory Board and/or the District Board of Ministry can aid in selecting a neutral party to engage the unassigned minister in a healing, restoring dialogue. But what cannot be allowed to continue is a total break in communication.

A further means of providing care and nurture to unassigned clergy is to arrange networking groups. Most districts are organized as zones or clusters and regular meetings take place in which pastors network, socialize, engage in peer learning, and share vision. A similar meeting for the unassigned may also be facilitated, either by the district superintendent or another minister. While some, if not all, unassigned clergy will have hesitation to participate at first, the longing for fellowship and support will likely win out. Of necessity there may be an element of group therapy as pastors work through the grieving process. However, the meetings need to be structured and point toward preparation to re-enter the ministry. Pastoral Ministries at the Global Ministry Center could provide valuable assistance in developing re-entry training for unassigned clergy. And in fact, such training could turn the period of forced inactivity into a sabbatical out of which could emerge a reenergized, retooled, and refocused pastor with more potential for effectiveness than ever before.

As the District Advisory Board, the District Board of Ministry, and the district superintendent report, whether to the general superintendent in jurisdiction or to the district assembly, on their communication with the unassigned, it will become a much higher priority. And remember, the BIG WHY here is to recapture the lost opportunity of veteran pastors with much to contribute in talent, experience, training, and wisdom. Rather than writing these wounded leaders off, they just might be a better investment of time and resources than always training new recruits.

3. Appoint an ombudsman for unassigned clergy.

To whom can an unassigned clergy go for help when they are meeting barriers to re-entering the ministry? The Board of General Superintendents has a long history of avoiding intervention in district and local affairs. I personally have extensive experience with unanswered letters and unfulfilled promises of a phone call from general superintendents and headquarters personnel to expect that any of our top leaders is going to reach out in a time of ministry and career crisis. Neither is there much promise of help from the district superintendents. For example, at one point I sent out 63 résumés to district superintendents in North America with a cover letter clearly stating that I wanted to re-enter the ministry. Of those 63 résumés, three were returned as sent to the wrong address. Of the 60 remaining, only 20 district superintendents afforded me the courtesy of an acknowledgement, with the majority of those being form letters sent out by a secretary. And this was from district superintendents with whom I had been a colleague just two years previously. If my personal connections with the district superintendents couldn't generate a better response, think of the pastors that do not have such connections. There really is no place to turn when a minister is involuntarily forced out of the ministry due to unmanaged conflict in the local church.

I have not had opportunity for much discussion of this idea with others and therefore have not fleshed out any of the practical details. I don't know if the ombudsman should be lay or clergy, at the district or headquarters level, paid or unpaid, or all of the above. Further, I have not attempted to determine what level of authority for action should be given to this position. Authority questions to be

considered include whether or not an ombudsman could overrule the actions of a local church, a district superintendent, and/or a District Advisory Board. As a starting point, it is my opinion that the ombudsman should provide counsel in helping the involuntarily unassigned to evaluate the merits of their case for re-entering the ministry, assist with strategies for locating new ministry opportunities, advocate for re-entry when appropriate, and assist with the preparation of an appeal to higher authority when such action is deemed appropriate and necessary. The ombudsman must also be an individual with the highest level of respect among all stakeholders in the organization. In any case, I simply know that among the numerous pastors with whom I have discussed the matter of representation on any number of issues, there is the feeling that they have no where to turn in a time of trouble. We can solve that.⁹

4. Hold the unassigned clergy accountable for their efforts to re-enter the ministry.

Just as a new recruit is required to write reports and be in communication with a mentor and the District Board of Ministry in order to move forward in the ordination process, so also the unassigned clergy should be reporting and communicating. If for some reason the unassigned minister chooses not to pursue re-entry, they should be accountable at least at the level of stating their intentions in writing for each of the four years they retain their ministerial

⁹ The 2009 General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene authorized a commission to consider extensive revision of the church's Manual. Thus the current quadrennium is an ideal opportunity to study the merits of this proposal and formulate new policy accordingly.

credentials prior to having them withdrawn for inactivity.¹⁰ A review of the minister's participation in the aforementioned networking meetings as well as his/her contacts with superintendents on other districts should be incorporated into reports on a quarterly basis. If the minister professes to an on-going call to the ministry and a genuine desire to re-enter the ministry, then that minister must be willing to demonstrate and communicate his/her commitment just as the church requires of a new recruit.

Will such accountability be painful and frightening? Absolutely! And the only antidote for such emotions is to help the unassigned minister reexamine her/his BIG WHY. The BIG WHY will overwhelm the insecurity of such accountability.

5. Establish a regional mechanism for the evaluation and endorsement of persons desiring to re-enter the ministry.¹¹

As stated above, an involuntary termination of ministry usually plunges the unassigned into a period of grief accompanied by deep questions and self-examination. The minister who is willing to face with honesty her/his contribution to the current predicament will also seek genuine answers to questions about

¹⁰ "436.2. A member of the clergy who fails to fulfill the responsibilities of the clergy by remaining unassigned for four or more years will be considered to be no longer participating as clergy. In such instances, the person will be required to file his or her credential. The District Ministerial Credentials Board shall report to the district assembly "the credential of (the elder or deacon in question) has been filed by the District Ministerial Credentials Board." This action should be considered nonprejudicial to character. The individual who files may have his or her credential reinstated according to the provisions of 437.2." (Manual, Church of the Nazarene, 2009-2013.) See also: " 436.8. When an unretired elder or deacon ceases from active service as a member of the clergy and takes full-time secular employment, after a period of two years he or she may be required by the District Ministerial Credentials Board to resign from the clergy order or file his or her credential and to return his or her credential to the general secretary. This two-year period shall begin at the district assembly immediately following the cessation of activity as a member of the clergy. The District Ministerial Credentials Board shall report its action to the district assembly. This action should be considered nonprejudicial to character." Ibid.

¹¹ The author expresses appreciation to Rob Songer for guidance in crafting this proposal.

whether or not he/she is ready for re-entry to ministry. Questions will also be raised concerning when and where re-entry should take place.

To facilitate an informed and objective assessment of a re-entry candidate's fitness for placement in ministry, a mechanism of assessment would be an invaluable assistance to both the candidate and district superintendents. There is a need for a place where the wounded can go to be thoroughly examined. Questions to be addressed could include: How broken am I? What do I need to do? What changes do I need to make? What other help is available to me? How can I know I am getting better? When should I try to get a position again? And the big question: Does the church want me anymore?

The assessment process would most likely be facilitated on a regional level with the denomination's colleges and universities playing a key role. Currently there are regional assessment centers provided for persons entering the ministry for the first time, those being evaluated for church planting assignments, and clergy in their last five years of active ministry. The Center for Pastoral Leadership at Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, California, is an example of a denominational institution already engaged in clergy assessments of various categories. Thus the format is already in place for a regional assessment center to be established for clergy seeking to re-enter the ministry.

Once the candidate has been deemed ready for re-entry, then help can be provided for crafting a cover letter and updating a résumé, as well as developing strategies for contacting district superintendents to seek placement. Out of the

assessment process a letter of endorsement from a highly respected leader within the assessment structure could be provided on behalf of the candidate. The letter could state that this individual is sound, clearly still possessing his/her call, with not only the gifts and graces, but also a vast amount of experience that could be a great blessing to the Kingdom generally and the Church of the Nazarene specifically. The letter could be distributed to district superintendents within the region where the unassigned has been residing, and perhaps distributed to all district superintendents in North America. That word could be the best single key to opening doors that would otherwise remain locked.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been proffered as a reflective white paper. I have endeavored to share enough of my own story, supplemented with additional anecdotal evidence, so as to give credibility to my proposals for changes in policies of the Church of the Nazarene. I have sought to be reasonably objective and to avoid the temptation to lash out and/or simply use this as a forum to express my grief. That these issues are of great personal importance to me is readily evident by the nearness of my tears. Clearly I am still in the healing process from my experiences and have much yet to go before I can truly say that it is behind me and I have moved on.

So as I conclude this presentation I will tell you what I am hoping to accomplish. In one word, it is **communication**. It was stated in a recent real estate training class I attended that 93% of all conflict is due to a breakdown in communication. The Church of the Nazarene needs to hold itself accountable for

the breakdown of communication that has been the barrier to re-entering the ministry. The proposals I have set before you in this paper are all designed to reopen communication as the principle pathway to re-entering the ministry. A long time ago I read a statement somewhere that said, "The Church is communication." It will be as we communicate with unassigned clergy that relationships will be built and barriers dissolved. Then the answer will emerge to the question, "Doesn't the church want me anymore?" And the church will once again live up to a slogan of the 1980's, "Welcome to the Church of the Nazarene. Our church can be your home."

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