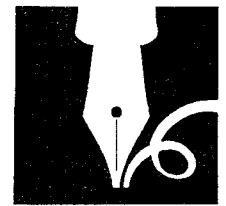


Connections



A monthly letter calling the church to faithful new life

NUMBER 30 - APRIL 1995

BY BARBARA WENDLAND

505 CHEROKEE DRIVE

TEMPLE, TX 76504

817-773-2625

A letter to a beginning pastor

Dear Pastor,

As you enter the pulpit, please consider this view from a pew.

In your new appointment you'll have many demands on your time, but I urge you to give high priority to the worship services you lead.



In most congregations, the Sunday worship services furnish the main contact that most lay members have with their church and its pastor. You may be wonderful at one-to-one pastoral care and other aspects of your job, but some of us will never have occasion to see you in those roles. We'll know you only through worship services.



Besides, only clergy are permitted to do most of the preaching and the planning and leading of worship. We lay members are allowed to fill other roles in the church, but when it comes to preaching, designing worship, and administering the sacraments we're mostly at your mercy.



If your sermons put us to sleep or don't address our real concerns, therefore, you'll lose a lot of us. If sitting through the rest of the worship service is a chore,



and if it doesn't let us express our praise to God in the ways we feel able to express it, only the diehards among us will keep coming. Here are some things you can do to keep us hooked in.

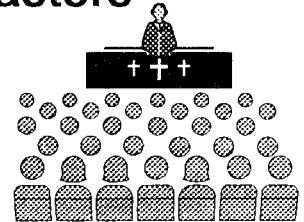


▪ **Speak lay language.** Unfortunately, in your seminary classes your professors may have rewarded you for using stilted, wordy, abstract, passive, academic language like this typical sentence from a seminary student's paper—"When Jesus

Many views of pastors

Like most other longtime churchgoers I've seen many pastors do the familiar jobs that the ordained ministry entails.

However, I've also seen pastors' professional and personal lives from other angles. I've attended seminary, served on the local-church committees that work with intern pastors, and served on a seminary's board. I've been a member of the regional board that interviews and votes on candidates for ordination and deals with complaints against clergy. Through clergy friends and clergy for whom I've done spiritual direction, I've become aware



of problems that clergy rarely feel they can reveal publicly. Because of these experiences I've thought a lot about how clergy are prepared for their ministry and especially for their first appointments as pastors.

In earlier issues of *Connections* I've mentioned ways in which I believe lay people need to consider pastors' needs. In this issue I'm suggesting ways in which I think pastors need to take lay members' experience and feelings into account, especially when the pastors are new at the job.

Some readers, clergy and lay, will undoubtedly disagree with my views, but I'm offering them anyway. I hope that reading them will help you clarify your own views about what we expect of our pastors. I hope what I say will also encourage you to discuss your views openly with both clergy and laity, in your congregation and beyond. I believe that for the good of the church we need to examine these issues openly, from all our different viewpoints.



Christ is accepted as Lord and Savior the reconciling of humanity to God is accomplished."

That kind of statement won't cut it with many lay people. Please put its contents in a simple and direct form like this instead: "When we accept Jesus Christ into our lives, we find God." Then give a concrete example of how you or someone else became aware of God upon accepting Jesus.

(continued on page 2)

(A letter to a beginning pastor, continued from page 1)

Please avoid King-James-style words and lengthy quotes from literature and from academic theologians, too. The familiar contemporary words that most lay people use in everyday conversation will carry more weight.

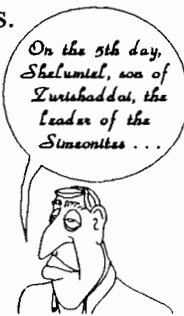
- **Illustrate** generously with stories about experiences that we can identify with. Include emotion and humor.



- **Limit your topic.** Don't try to cover the whole Christian faith in any one sermon. It will be so vague and general that it won't really say anything.

- **Choose sermon topics that matter to us.** Show us how the Christian faith can make a real difference in facing our most urgent concerns.

- **Choose topics that matter to you.** This may mean abandoning the lectionary at times, despite all the reasons you've been given for using it. If you obviously don't find your topic important or interesting, you can't expect us to care about it either.



On the 5th day, Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai, the leader of the Simeonites . . .

- **Compose your sermon carefully.** Choose an opening that will hook our interest immediately and make us want to know what is coming. Don't just meander into your topic. And don't assume

that we will figure out what your main point is. State it, and state it early, in strong, familiar words.

Follow your main point with a clear, obvious progression through the points that support it (only a few!). Build to a strong climax that you express in pithy, memorable words. Then stop quickly. Don't rehash what you've already covered, making us wonder if you will ever end. Let us leave with your sermon's climax fresh in our minds and hearts.

- **Compose the whole worship service carefully.** Like your sermon, it needs a strong opening and it needs to build to a climax. This may be the climax of your sermon, or a powerful anthem or solo. Following it, the service needs to end quickly so we can leave inspired.

If using the order of worship that you learned in seminary means ending with blah ingredients like the Gloria Patri or the offering, we won't be present long to appreciate it. We'll soon be looking for less tiresome ways to spend our Sunday mornings.

Say no when doing God's will requires it

Although I urge you to pay attention to some of your members' wishes regarding sermons and worship services, I hope that in other ways you'll be brave enough to ignore what people want you to do.

- **Don't try to be a carbon copy of another pastor.** Every pastor, like everyone else, does some jobs better than others. Look elsewhere to find effective ways of doing what your mentor doesn't do well. Be yourself.



- **Don't let the members of your congregation set your whole agenda.** Does this mean you risk being ousted by them, even if you're right and they're wrong? Yes. But God didn't call you to please everyone or to keep yourself comfortable.

- **Don't let the official church hierarchy set your whole agenda.** Does this mean risking being sent to Podunk for your next appointment? Yes. And I realize that it's much easier for me to make this suggestion than for you to follow it. Still, which is more important—getting a better appointment, or obeying God?

Of course you must choose your battles. Sometimes in order to reach or stay in the place where you believe God calls you to be, you must temporarily keep quiet and not rock the boat. But be sure you're not just rationalizing to justify doing what keeps you comfortable and moves you up the ladder.

Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it.

—Mark 8:35

Even if your sermon's topic and composition are great, poor delivery can sabotage your efforts.

- **Don't mumble.** Learn to enunciate clearly. Speak loudly enough to be understood easily throughout your sanctuary. And remember, some of us lose hearing as we age.

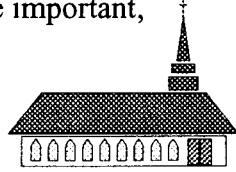


- **Avoid distracting mannerisms.** Watch out for habitual gestures or odd facial expressions, or constant use of a phrase like "you know." It's easy to get these habits without realizing it. With constant repetition they loom larger and larger, distracting us from your message.



To find and correct problems like these, ask someone to videotape your sermon occasionally for you to look at, or ask a member whose occupation includes public speaking to help you improve your sermon delivery.

▪ **Acknowledge your real beliefs, doubts, and feelings.** Will you lose some members by doing this? You may. But which is more important, keeping names on the roll or being true to your calling and to God's will as you understand it?



▪ **Admit the church's faults.**

Don't just parrot the official church position if you can't do so with integrity. Denying problems destroys the church's credibility (and yours) with the very people who could help remedy some of the problems. Many perceptive and capable people don't want to get involved in an institution whose leaders seem unable or unwilling to recognize its faults and to work toward remedying them.

▪ **Don't do all the ministry.** Instead, help church members to discover and pursue their own ministries, most of which will be out in the world. Encourage members to do what

needs to be done within the church, but don't give them the impression that attending church meetings and holding church offices is their main calling.

Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

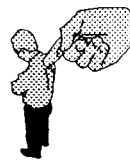
—James 1:22

Take the laity seriously

Although you need to say no to some members' wishes, you need to pay attention to others.

▪ **Give critics the benefit of the doubt.**

Some of them will be mean, petty, and seriously mistaken. Others sincerely want to protect the church from what they see as serious dangers. These lay people may have been faithful members of your congregation for many years and kept it alive with money and volunteer service. Especially if a new pastor is young (meaning younger than these members) and relatively new in the ministry, they fear that he or she will destroy what has taken years to achieve. They know that if this happens the pastor will leave but they'll still be there needing to pick up the pieces.



▪ **Don't assume that you always know better than your church members.** Both laity and clergy

are sometimes right and sometimes wrong about what God's will is and about what is happening in the church and the world.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

—Romans 12:6

▪ **Don't insist on being the only spiritual guide for your congregation, or the guardian of all their beliefs.** Different people respond to different preaching styles and see the Christian faith in different ways. Even if you're doing a great job, some members will be turned off by your style. Invite guest speakers often, so those members will get to see and hear someone who reaches them.

Stay alert to dangers

Many people put their pastor on a pedestal, and you can easily get the idea that you deserve to be there. That's not realistic or healthy, either for you or for the people who try to put you there. It makes you very vulnerable to certain temptations. Please stay alert to them.



▪ **Don't let sex be your downfall.** Sexuality and spirituality are closely connected. If this is news to you, get reliable information about it in a hurry, for your own protection and that of your church members and family.

As a pastor you will counsel people, often in private, who are feeling an unusually strong need to be appreciated and cared for. They'll be looking for a rescuer and therefore willing to do anything you ask of them, no matter how wrong it might seem in other circumstances.

You will have immense power in these situations. Whatever you do and say can easily appear (to you, as well as to the person you are counseling) to carry God's stamp of approval. The situation becomes even more ripe for abuse if you feel lonely or unappreciated yourself, as you undoubtedly will at times. Be careful.

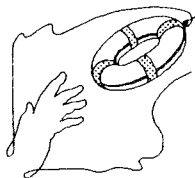


▪ **Don't let money be your downfall.** Even if managing money isn't your strong point, you must learn how to recognize whether the church's funds are being managed wisely. And when your salary is small, pressures are great, and you're handling money that doesn't belong to you, temptation can get very strong. Beware. Don't borrow from church funds or leave personal or church bills unpaid. You can harm the church as well as yourself.



▪ **Protect victims, not victimizers.** You may become aware of powerful clergy and laity who

habitually commit sexual or financial offenses. You have an obligation to their past, present, and future victims to help stop these abuses of power. Don't protect your career or another clergy person's or lay leader's at the expense of the whole church or of suffering victims. Protect the victims instead.



▪ **Stay in touch with someone with whom you can be your real self.** Find someone to talk with regularly, with whom you can be completely open and honest and who won't let you hide behind a mask of false piety or Pollyanna happiness.

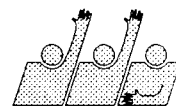
You've accepted a tough job. However, you've also embarked on a God-given calling, and there's nothing more important than that.

My prayers go with you.

Your sister in Christ,

Barbara

**Next month . . .
Which voices will be heard
when church decisions are made?**



Connections 4-95

Barbara Wendland
505 Cherokee Drive
Temple, TX 76504

Bulk Rate
U. S. Postage
PAID
Temple, TX
Permit # 380

Address correction requested

A letter to a beginning pastor

Seminary professors—
your spring graduates might
find this issue useful

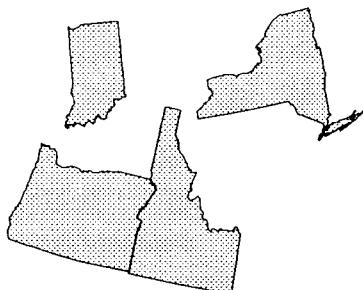
You're welcome
to make copies

Clergy mentors and supervisors—
this issue could help
your area's new ordinands

Welcome, new *Connections* readers!

Groups as well as individuals are constantly asking to be added to the *Connections* mailing list. With this issue *Connections* begins going regularly to all recipients of the conference resource packets in 3 more United Methodist Annual Conferences:

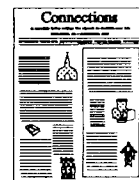
- 700 in the Troy (New York) Annual Conference
- 1375 in the North Indiana Annual Conference
- 525 in the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference.



Welcome to everyone who is receiving *Connections* for the first time this month!

If you've just discovered *Connections*

and you want to start receiving it monthly, send me your name, mailing address, and \$5 to cover printing and postage for the current year's issues. If you also want the 2 years' back issues that are available, add \$5 for each year you want. For more information, write me at the address above or phone me at 817-773-2625.



I'm a United Methodist lay woman, neither a church employee nor a clergy wife. *Connections* is a one-person ministry that I do on my own initiative and partly at my own expense, speaking only for myself. *Connections* goes to more than 7000 readers in 48 states—laity and clergy in at least 10 church denominations and some non-churchgoers.