

# Pastoral Identity

*A Reading Resource  
for  
First Call Theological Education  
Participants*

*Prepared by*

**Leadership Support Department  
Division for Ministry**

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA  
1997

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Produced by Leadership Support in the Division for Ministry of the ELCA.

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# PASTORAL IDENTITY

## A READING RESOURCE FOR FIRST-CALL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS

### BACKGROUND

This essay has its foundations in a paper written by Richard Vangerud, Annandale, Minnesota who chaired a Work Group on Pastoral Identity for the Division for Ministry. Concerns about "pastoral identity" were raised in the work of the Study of Theological Education Task Force. This study identified pastoral identity as an issue to be addressed, especially in reference to First-Call Theological Education.

In articulating its goals for First-Call Theological Education, the Task Force wrote:

*The common purpose of first-call theological education is to enhance the transition from seminary to parish. The desired outcome is that during their first three years under call, pastors and rostered lay leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will have made the initial transition into their respective leadership roles and will have grown in knowledge of God's Word and the Lutheran confessional witness, in love for Jesus Christ and his Church, and in commitment to its mission.*

In order to address this common purpose, ELCA programs of first-call theological education will give special attention to three goals:

1. The personal development of leadership style and collegiality, spiritual discipline, and ministerial identity appropriate to the respective rosters;
2. Competence in the overall integration of various aspects of the practice of ministry;
3. Discernment of the local and regional context of ministry.<sup>1</sup>

To assist synods in their planning, each of these dimensions has been developed in greater detail by a working group, including representatives from synods, seminaries, continuing education centers, churchwide units, and first-call pastors. The work group on pastoral or ministerial identity described aspects of goal #1 in the following way:

#### ***Ministerial Identity***

- \* *Believing in God and living from the promise that God's Word will accomplish God's purpose in the lives of people and congregations.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Study of Theological Education for Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report to the 1995 Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Appendix E: First-Call Theological Education Churchwide Standards and Guidelines, p. 32.

- \* *Moving from being a ministerial candidate to being a pastor or rostered lay leader involved in life-long learning.*
- \* *Articulating a vision of evangelical pastoral or diaconal ministry.*
- \* *Balancing ministerial and personal identity through the development of appropriate boundaries and an understanding of appropriate and inappropriate conduct.*
- \* *Collegiality in ministry, accountability, and mutuality of the various rosters.*
- \* *Developing spiritual discipline that deepens one's relationship with God.*
- \* *Learning to wrestle with the complexity of demands, expectations, challenges, and disappointments of ministerial leadership.*
- \* *Finding fulfillment and joy in ministry.*
- \* *Addressing one's own personal, emotional, physical, and interpersonal health.*
- \* *Learning to live in the conversation between God's Word in scripture and human live in the concrete context of one's ministry.<sup>2</sup>*

### **AUDIENCE FOR THIS ESSAY**

The primary audience for this essay on pastoral identity are the newly called pastors and the congregations to which they have been called. Other audiences that might receive and discuss this essay are: (1) colleague or mentor groups, (2) synod staff involved in FCTE, (3) coordinators in synods or regions for FCTE. The contributions and responsibilities of these audiences will be made more explicit as this essay examines the relationships between these audiences which affect one's pastoral identity.

### **PURPOSE OF ESSAY**

It is our hope that the reflections and issues raised in this essay will stimulate thought and conversation as pastors (perhaps with their colleagues and mentors) and the newly called leaders' congregations plan the continuing education covenants which seek to carry out their mutual ministry. It is also hoped that this essay may be a stimulus to synod committees as they plan their continuing education offerings. In addition, it would be helpful for the providers of that education to reflect on this document.

### **CONSIDERING DEFINITIONS**

Taking up the charge to increase our understanding of pastoral identity and the question of how better to enhance it is no easy matter. Identity language, though currently popular, is new to the church and its theology. Coming from the behavioral sciences, this language is used especially in pastoral care settings. However, many seminary theologians, bishops and parish clergy are uncomfortable with this language. Nevertheless, the term pastoral or ministerial identity is increasingly common in the church.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-34.

Background research for this essay used extensively the work of Erik Erikson who gave us the identity language in his psychosocial theory. The search also led to the older language of "self" developed in William James' work.

Theological sources, include the work of Paul Tillich and Daniel Day Williams who introduced the identity language into modern theology. Their focus, however, was "Christian identity" rather than pastoral identity. [A selected bibliography is included in Appendix A).

From a synthesis of the literature and responses to a series of questions posed to the Work Group and a number of other persons across the church, a working definition of pastoral identity and its components was developed. This is discussed in Part I.

## **OVERVIEW OF PAPER**

Part I is a working definition of pastoral identity that emerged from the study of the Work Group. It develops the thesis that pastoral identity as such is not immediately accessible for any shaping activity, but that there are various components that feed into it and are accessible to actions by various partners.

In Part II, the responsibilities and roles of the various partners in pastoral identity development is outlined.

Part III examines the climate for nurture and underlines again the important issue of mutuality between the various partners in this venture.

Part IV organizes a series of commentaries around the seven components that can shape pastoral identity. This is followed by some concluding observations.

## **Part I: Pastoral Identity: A Working Definition**

*Pastoral identity formations, presuppose relatively stable patterns of self perception that are confirmed by significant others. Professional determinants form in the context of education and induction into leadership of a specific community of faith. Personal factors are primary, however, and must be taken seriously in resolving the ambiguities surrounding efforts to understand and foster pastoral formation.*  
Eduard Thornton

*Pastoral identity has an ontological claim (an internal reality of self as pastoral) rather than being based on the function or role of the ordained clergy person.*  
Joretta Marshall

*Pastoral identity is that aspect of a person's total identity which is composed of a distinctive content, primarily theological in nature. It is marked by the primacy of an orientation which, in its essence, is a relatively conscious statement of theological convictions. These convictions are shaped in the context of an ecclesiastical tradition and take on particular theological content.*  
Joretta Marshall

The letter of call and the rite of ordination make up the objective framework for the development of a full pastoral identity. They establish the boundaries and the authority of the office. As such they ritualize the setting-apart of the pastor by the church. However, they are not in themselves the only or final determinants of pastoral identity. The call and ordination, as significant outward signs and limits, prevent pastoral identity from resting simply in a subjective assessment about a person's call based on feeling or individualistic self-authentication.

Pastoral identity has two aspects. The first is the subjective but powerful realization that one is an authentic pastor to a particular people at a particular time in their history. The second aspect is the realization of people in the congregation or ministry setting that a certain called person is an authentic pastor to them.

Various components that feed this awareness of call and ministry can be identified and are available to cultivation and nurture. These basic and interrelated, though not necessarily exhaustive, components are:

1. A deepening confidence in God's grace.
2. A sense of being with oneself.
3. Confirmation by congregation and community.
4. Confirmation by peers.
5. Continuity with fathers and mothers in the faith.
6. Development of devotional disciplines.
7. Claiming of the theological tradition of the church.

8. Growing through the crucible.
9. Identity development as a pilgrimage.

A careful reflection on the above components brings us to the realization that pastoral identity is hidden in the activities of the Triune God. Its Trinitarian shape may explain the mystery that seemingly surrounds this unique identity.

The above components certainly can be affected by the individual, but they can also be influenced by peers (colleagues and mentors), by congregational members, by neighborhoods and communities, by synods, educational centers and teachers, and by family and others.

Pastoral identity in one sense looks inward. However, it is the pastor with a strong sense of identity rooted in God's grace who has the ego strength and resources for personal renewal that allow him/her to take leadership and engage in a prophetic mission of grace and justice in a world in need of redemption.

## **Part II: Responsibilities for Nurture and Development**

The route that leads to pastoral identity is complex and somewhat mysterious. The components that feed into it, however, are available to the church. They may each be enhanced by nurture and development. The question then is how may the primary partners, *the individual pastor, the congregation and the synod*, work together to bring about a systematic and effective development of pastoral identity. We will look at each of the components again and make some suggestions as to how the partners can work together to enhance them.

- *A deepening confidence in God's grace* ideally has its origins in childhood, family and in the home congregation. As such, it can be traced across the life cycle, influenced particularly where breakthroughs of grace made their mark. To deepen this confidence, all the primary partners have a role to play. *First-call congregations* especially have a responsibility to surround the newly arrived pastor with prayerful acceptance and openness. They may also work together with *the synod* to provide appropriate First-Call Theological Education. *The synod* has an important role in helping the new pastor develop confidence in God's grace as synodical leaders select and train *mentors* and *colleague group leaders* who can help new pastors keep the focus on grace during their anxious arrival times.
- *A sense of being with one's self* is primarily the responsibility of *the individual* in the first-call situation. New pastors will want to structure times for reflection on the many new factors that they face in the transition from seminary to parish. Maintaining contacts with significant others in their past life pilgrimage-- family of origins, spouse, past friends, teachers, pastors may also be helpful in dealing with the "crisis of arrival." Many report that CPE training provides effective assistance in this area. For some pastors, personal counseling is important. Sensitive, well trained *mentors* can also help maintain this line of continuity with the past.

- *Confirmation by congregation and community* by its very nature is the responsibility of the *first-call congregation* and, in the case of multi-staff calls, the entire staff of that congregation. *The senior pastor* needs to be especially sensitive to the graceful ways a new pastor can be integrated into the life of the congregation. *The synod* has a responsibility to help first-call congregations realize the importance of this early affirmation. Congregations should be encouraged to establish and train a solid pastoral support committee. Synods should avoid placing first-call candidates in congregations that continue to demonstrate unresolved distrust in the office of the ministry because of a traumatic experience with a prior pastor.
- *Confirmation by peers* places a special responsibility on the synod to train mentors and colleague group leaders to assist in the development process. Older peers might serve as spiritual mentors to their younger colleagues. Individual *clergy* should take seriously their responsibilities to relate gracefully to their *peers*. They might especially attend to older peers--those who may need this relationship as much as younger clergy. Because they must deal with long-term barriers to acceptance, women and minorities might need special support and encouragement.
- *Continuity with fathers and mothers in the faith* has several dimensions. Maintaining continuity with the prophets, apostles and forerunners in the faith is a responsibility which certainly lies with *individual* pastors. They may carry out that responsibility as they engage in the kind of structured reading and reflection which is one of the components of First-Call Theological Education. In addition, they might revisit their biblical, historical, and theological studies in light of their particular ministry situation. Structured continuing education also can contribute to a developing sense of continuity with the past. Another continuity dimension will encourage new pastors to understand their particular context of ministry in its historical and contemporary structures. *Synods* and *congregations* might make available the faith story of the region and the fathers and mothers of faith who served in that particular ministry setting.
- *Development of devotional disciplines* is the responsibility of the *individual*. *Synods* should help *congregations* understand the importance of a pastor's devotional life. They should be encouraged to make sure their pastors have time for Bible reading, prayer and reflection. Pastoral support committees can encourage pastors to reserve regular personal devotional time. *Colleague groups* may also be a part of a pastor's devotional discipline. *Mentors* can assist new pastors with specific suggestions for enhancing their devotional prayer life.
- *Claiming the theological tradition of the church* is primarily the responsibility of the *individual* pastor. Pastoral *peer groups* can help assist newly called pastors express their understanding of their theological tradition in the context of their new ministry. The *synod* should train colleague leaders and mentors who are able to assist in the process of applying theological traditions. Synods might offer various continuing education courses that would help new pastors integrate their specific context with the faith heritage of the church. They might also offer a chance for pastors to learn new ministry skills at a site away from the parish.

- *Growing through the crucible* will certainly be a part of first call ministry. Sooner or later all clergy will be forced to deal with unresolved conflict and tensions. Can these experiences lead to renewal and growing sanctification? By the grace of God, yes. The *individual* has responsibility to seek the “good outcome” God promises. Pastors will, however, need the support and prayers of the *congregation*, even if the members do not understand the depth of a pastor’s problem. The *synod* needs to be sensitive and have experienced *mentors and colleague groups* available for support. In some cases the synods may need to let all first call clergy know that they have special pastoral care and counseling ready to help.
- *Identity development as a pilgrimage.* Faith life for the Christian can be seen as a pilgrimage. Pastoral identity has its own rhythms of growth within this pilgrimage. The *individual* should be encouraged to seek patience as a gift of the Spirit in this pilgrimage. With help from the *synod congregations* can embrace and support their pastor’s continuing growth and development. Carefully chosen and trained *mentors and colleague leaders* can offer insight and practical helps along the way. Synods might offer training sessions for older pastors to help them see their unique role in assisting younger pastors in their pilgrimage.

We have focused on the primary partnership of *the individual, the synod and the congregation* as they carry out their responsibility to enhance the various components that shape pastoral identity. They are obviously all interrelated. The church should continue to work toward a climate that fosters a pastors’s growth and development as all of the players maintain a partnership of respect and understanding.

### **Part III: a Climate for the Nurture of Pastoral Identity**

*Peers are important in developing and maintaining pastoral identity, as long as the relationships are healthy ones. But because most pastors seem not to know how to be in quality relationships with one another, this is a difficult one. Where else but among peers are pastors able to be in ongoing dialog and formation about pastoral identity, mutual accountability, conversation and consolation. We need to help one another address the question, "What does it mean to be a pastor in this culture, this geography, this setting, this particular situation?"*

*Response Group Member*

*How can the inexperienced gain new experiences if the experienced keep all new experiences to themselves?*

*Gerald O'Grady*

Affirmation or confirmation by the community, including older peers, is a major contributor to pastoral identity development. However, efforts to help new pastors strengthen their sense of pastoral identity should not convey the impression that first-call clergy are deficient products needing to be "done unto" by those who know best. New clergy should be treated as partners and recognized as colleagues in a project designed to enhance and renew all clergy. Indeed, first-call clergy have an important contribution to make in this mutual learning/growing process. The actions of a welcoming and supporting church confirming their pastor’s identity is essential, not only formally in the letter of call and rite of ordination but also informally and experientially. The presence of this ready, active, confirming climate is vital for the development of pastoral identity.

An important element in a climate of trust is the confirming partnership among pastors. The partnership can be seen as a reciprocity between more and less experienced clergy. Together they form an intergenerational, collegial relationship that benefits both partners. Some of these initial partnerships may develop into genuine one-to-one mentoring relationships.

More experienced partners who emerge as mentors offer pastoral wisdom that grows more specific and helpful when it is shared in a mentoring relationship. The less experienced partners in these relationships also have much to offer. They may bring enthusiasm and a sensitivity to the issues of the new generation, along with fresh cultural and theological insights. Mentoring relationships foster a healthy mutual responsibility and accountability.

The work of shaping a climate of acceptance and growth must also take into account diversity among pastors. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America includes various streams of pastoral tradition. In former times, new pastors were equipped to be significant leaders addressing their time and place with prophetic wisdom and insight. In preparing pastors, the Lutheran church has rich theological treasures to draw on. However, for the most part it has been defined by its immigrant heritage. Today Lutherans, while cherishing their traditional culture, must deal with rapidly increasing diversity of cultures and a growing variety of perspectives. For instance, female clergy who are a relatively new phenomenon for most Lutherans may bring fresh and challenging perspectives to ministry.

An increasing racial diversity in the Lutheran church offers rich cultural additions to the Northern European roots of Lutheran traditions. Generational differences, socio-economic issues, varying rural/urban/suburban/ex-urban/inner-city contexts keep forcing change upon the church. In addition, cultural variations between regions with their specific contexts can impact the shape and texture of pastoral identity.

The limitations of this resource prohibit us from fully probing and developing all of these areas, even though each is important. They should be probed in a climate of open and trusting collegial partnerships as the resources of our faith heritage are applied to the many frontiers of ministry. As partners in that ongoing process identify and share their new learnings regarding diverse situations, the whole church is enriched. A positive climate and effective partnerships allow pastoral identity formation at contextual edges as leaders encounter unfamiliar issues and concerns. Rather than recoiling or retreating, new leaders can benefit by being open to learning from those with unique views or new theological insights. As they do so in a context of acceptance, new pastors can develop prophetic pastoral insights that will apply to their new situations.

Climate for the nurture of pastoral "identity" is also a responsibility of synodical leaders who offer first-call programs to newly called clergy. Bishops and synod staff should take the lead in creating such a climate that affirms the gifts of all participants in the process in a spirit of reciprocity and collegiality. **The climate that keeps the process open as an ongoing interaction of trust is as important as structured programs.**

## Part IV: Commentaries on the Components Enhancing Pastoral Identity

### 1. A Deepening Confidence in God's Grace

*A deepening confidence in God's grace in Christ, anchored in baptism, and daily growing in life and ministry.*  
Component One

*Paul knows very well that man cannot exist without recognition, without his being recognized by others, without rejoicing in his recognition himself--consciously or unconsciously. As such, the need for recognition is not something perverse, but is appropriate for man, who has to live with others and in the sight of others. But it is a fundamental misconception for him to think he can extract recognition and establish his claim to recognition through what he does--through his work instead of his being. .... But his knowledge is perverted when man seeks to extract recognition and establishes a claim backed up by what he himself has done-- when he does not understand that it is merely bestowed upon him, and that in reality he can only live by grace.*

*Rudolph Bultmann*

*It is in dependence on grace first of all that we gain freedom which makes our activity essential. For now we are given the possibility of always acting as determined by grace, and so always in freedom. Or, to put it in another way, the imperative to act as new men has gained meaning for us. Freedom remains in dependence; that is, standing in grace is not a closed condition, but a gift constantly grasped in freedom.*

*Rudolph Bultmann*

Identity is a concern of all human beings, those in communities and as individuals. Is there a purpose for our life or is our life meaningless? Does the human heart initiate good or evil? What place do we have in the broader human purpose? The Christian tradition approaches these questions in light of the gospel of grace. All that we have and are God has given us. We are not an accident or a product of chance, except to the degree that chance serves God's creative purpose. We exist by the will of God who creates out of love. Because of the marvel of self-consciousness, each person is able to ponder his or her individual identity. In this vast creation as humans we can say, "I". The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims that this uniqueness we have as individual humans is also the intended product of God's creative purpose, a gift of God.

The grace that defines our identity also undergirds us in ministry. Within the church--local, synodical, churchwide, or global--the office of pastor comes by the grace of God and belongs to no human. The church and its office of ministry exist before any individual person is called into ordained ministry. The office is established by Christ and received from Christ. Both the church and the office of ministry are gifts of God. This means that ordination and the call to ministry must come through the larger church and the local congregation. This is the public, mediated call.

The office of ministry is a gift to the individual pastor. The church as a whole is a steward of the office. It is not the congregation's to control. In fact, the new pastor's call may mean that this pastor will use his/hers gifts of the Spirit to promote change in the church. The only way that this could be avoided would be for the church to stop ordaining, or even more, to stop baptizing. The fact that ordination is a gift to the church demands that the church and the congregation fully recognize the ordained person as a bearer of the gospel to them. The office of pastor is gratuitous to all involved; as such it is a vehicle of grace.

The official ordination process may legitimize but cannot by itself create a pastor. The pastor slowly develops the confident belief that she or he is a pastor with a legitimate call to practice the office. This confidence will be tested throughout the pastor's career. But even in times of doubt, pastoral identity presumes that the conviction that one belongs in the Office of Ministry will, over time, form the framework of each pastor's identity.

Many factors contribute to a pastors' growing confidence: their theology of ministry and the church, their experiences in the church (including suffering), and the examples of others in ordained ministry. Recognition by peers, by the wider church, and by the congregation, remain important factors; so also a devotional discipline, a sense of the tradition of faith, and growing skills and competence in ministry. However, these factors are not sufficient in themselves to produce or sustain confidence. No mentor can elicit confidence at will. Even confidence in pastoral identity is a gift of God. Confidence that one is a pastor can come only by the Spirit, which like the wind moves of its own accord.

Ideally, candidates called by the church are gifted people. Because they are gifted, they will leave many career possibilities behind as they assume the office of ministry. A person who succeeds as an ordained minister would probably do well in a number of vocations. But it is the Spirit who urges a person to accept a call to any Christian vocation, so also to the ministry of word and sacrament.

Since so much of ministry results from the grace of God, in the end perhaps the only plausible formula for pastoral identity is Luther's formula: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." The freedom that comes from such a realization is the product of a deep confidence in the grace of God. Free from a need to demonstrate competence or to abide by strict predetermined rules or formulas for ministry, the pastor works out a life of great opportunity for ministry. Many would foist their expectations upon the pastor. Like others, pastors face the temptation to fall back on ready bootlegged identities: therapist, community organizer, advocate for a specific group, administrator, or many others. While responsible ministry may call pastors to engage in any or all of these tasks, when any of these become their entire profile, freedom for ministry may be sacrificed. The pastor's identity is nurtured always within the arena of God's grace. The pastor reclaims this freedom anew in every moment, in different situations with their different demands.

Obviously, a pastor's freedom is not a slovenly, laissez faire approach to vocation. The second part of Luther's formula suggests, this freedom, like all freedom, carries with it serious responsibility. Pastoral identity will languish apart from serious foundational work of study, without serious attention to the traces and challenges of grace in the tradition, and without the challenge of grace encountered through devotional vigilance, self examination and nurturing the forgiving spirit. In the end everything feeding pastoral identity must be processed through the pastor's freedom granted by the grace of God. This freedom remains both the strength and the struggle of pastoral identity.

The office of ministry is received by everyone who ever holds it. The conviction that one is a pastor cannot be created; it grows as a gift of the Spirit. The practice of ministry is the meeting of grace, freedom and commitment to the life of the church. Grace is the starting and ending point for pastoral identity.

## **2. A Sense of Being with Oneself**

*A sense of being at home with oneself involves healthy developmental changes of life--physical, psychological, social and spiritual. It involves healthy relationships with one's family of origin and significant other people in one's life pilgrimage, including spouse and children.*

*Component Two*

Certainly pastoral identity cannot exist unaffected by personal identity, nor can the call to pastoral ministry overpower or obliterate personal identity. To separate pastoral and personal identity in such a way denies the truth that the world flows from the grace of God and that the Holy Spirit broods over this world and works with its elements to fashion the kingdom of God. Those who seek a call to ministry have certain gifts that they bring to their calling. A central gift the future pastor must have is a healthy, functioning personal identity.

A healthy personal identity means that one is able to integrate pastoral identity with one's present experience in such a way that change is embraced in a context of continuity. The ability to integrate change within a sense of personal continuity is called "integrity". This integration allows a person to honor what one brings to a situation while honoring new experiences as well. Otherwise new experiences cannot be incorporated and cannot cause growth in one's sense of identity.

Integrity is anchored in the past yet remains open to future goals. If this weren't so, a person would have no way to move into the future with integrity. He/she would only drift in whichever direction the current winds blew. For the pastor, such a lack of identity could result in a dangerous absence of personal boundaries, which in turn would violate the congregation's sense of integrity and frustrate the congregation seeking quality leadership. Lack of pastoral identity might also cause a person to be willing to go along with a congregation that wants a pastor merely to act as an agent of its own ambitions and desires. On this practical level, the pastor who has not integrated an understanding of personal issues into his or her identity will not function effectively in ministry. Unresolved pain and unacknowledged brokenness can lead a person to replay conflicts from the past in each new situation or cause him/her to avoid situations that stir up past sufferings. Such behavior impedes the pastor's openness to the presence of the Spirit. Failure to integrate one's past could result in a lack of flexibility within the pastor's personal identity that can either turn a congregation into a mere reflection of the pastor's rigid sense of self or force the congregation to withdraw recognition of the pastor's ministry.

While it is true that pastors need to be at home with self to be effective, they also should continue to see both personal and pastoral identity within the framework of sin and grace. Brokenness and disintegration are a part of life. The chance to confess sin and welcome grace can produce an even greater integrity. Integrity which harmonize a flexibility gained from a recognition of one's own limitations and failings with a continuity derived from a confidence in God's grace in the past, present and future is an important goal in pastoral identity formation.

The church need not seek out perfect people for ordained ministry--those whose lives are unblemished, if indeed such persons actually exist. Pain and brokenness, when acknowledged and integrated into an understanding of one's life as a gift of God's grace, can become a gift for ministry. Pastors who are able to understand the spiritual struggles of others because of coming to terms with their own struggles, will be a blessing to their congregation and church.

### 3. Confirmation by Congregation and Community

*A confirmation and affirmation by the congregation and community that the pastor has been called to fulfill God's ministry in their midst and at this time in their history.*

*Component Three*

*"Some audiences energize you, others just suck from you."*

*Ed Harris*

*There is no doubt that God uses those sisters and brothers in Christ who support our ministry in positive ways to strengthen our faith and motivate our pastoral work. Being surrounded and upheld by a strong community of faith is extremely helpful in enabling us to grow in our spiritual lives and in maintaining our pastoral identity. A congregation which is not supportive of the pastor's basic ministry can diminish the identity of those who have weak pastoral identity. It requires a strong sense of God's call to maintain our pastoral identity when members of the congregation do not support us. Ultimately, it boils down to this: Will we obey God or others? It should however, go without saying that when a pastor and congregation are not at one, both need to examine very carefully how each has contributed to this lack of harmony.*

*Response Group Member*

If we are indeed in a post-Christian culture, as some say, we can no longer expect a secular, indifferent society to confirm the identity of the pastor. Some communities may offer pastors significant confirmation, but it is not to be counted on for the office of the ministry of the gospel.

The congregation, then, must do the real work of confirming pastoral identity. Formally, the congregation confirms the pastor's identity in the letter of call. But meaningful integration of pastoral identity begins with the congregation's informal recognition of the pastor as pastor "for us." This acceptance of the pastor does not require all members of the congregation to agree with everything the pastor does or says, but is an acknowledgment of the office of the pastor and that this person in that office is our pastor. The congregation has a responsibility to exercise the power to confirm identity.

Congregational recognition has several characteristics. First, it is an expression of *trust* in and *commitment* to the pastor, played out in many ways. While trust builds over time, a good faith beginning on the part of both pastor and congregation form the foundation of a positive relationship. On the congregation's part, this trust is also a trust in the office and the synod that has certified and/or recommended the candidate.

A second characteristic of such recognition is the congregation's acceptance of the responsibility inherent in pastoral identity. This acknowledgment requires reasonable *respect* for the office of ministry and provides a basis for mutuality in ministry. With such mutual respect intact, the pastor and the congregation can begin to forge a common identity in the situation to which both have been called. Mutual support requires that each party have the stature to influence the other.

Often this mutual identity emerges after a time of testing. From the beginning, both parties must answer some questions. Who are we with this person as our pastor? Will this person be committed and faithful to us? Who am I as pastor to this congregation? Will the members of the congregation be ministers with me and permit me to minister in a mutual partnership with them? Such questioning can develop into the formation of a mutual identity in a climate of faith and respect. While this kind of recognition and respect cannot by itself produce pastoral identity, it does provide the climate of mutuality for its development.

Because few secular vocations come close to the identity elements of the pastoral office, both the pastor and the congregation can fall victim to false expectations and self-made identities. Pastors may see the congregation as mere extensions of themselves. They may seek to mold the congregation to their vision of the kingdom of God-- a vision which may simply reflect their own home or internship congregation. Pastors may use the congregation as a mirror for self-aggrandizement or expect the congregation to function as a substitute family. Such approaches fail to respect the congregation's mission and fail to see the pastor as a servant of the gospel. Looking for a ready-made identity may lead some to borrow an identity from the secular world (i.e., therapist, executive, professor). Identities from these professions may elicit respect in the secular world but will miss the confirmation of the gospel that is the essence of pastoral ministry.

Congregations may lack a clear sense of their biblical mission and hold false identity expectations for their pastor. Instead of a shepherd they may be seeking a professional or resident holy person or an in-house chaplain. They might begin to see the pastor as the congregation's employee, always at their beck and call or the one who can deal with the rebellious young and succor the needy old. The pastor can become everyone's paid counselor.

The potential for distortion of the relationship between the pastor and parish does, however, demonstrate that both parties cooperate in forging pastoral identity. The congregation has great influence on the identity formation of the pastor. The first step is the confirmation that this pastor is God's minister in this congregation.

#### **4. Confirmation by Peers**

*A confirmation by supportive peers of different generations, that one is a pastor of the church fulfilling one's call in partnership alongside these colleagues as they pursue their calls.*

*Component Four*

*Where identity formation is relatively successful in youth, psychosocial development leads through the fulfillment of adult phases to a final integrity, the possession of a few principles which though gleaned from changing experiences yet prove unchangeable in essence. Without old people in possession of such integrity, young people in need of an identity can neither rebel or obey.*

*Erik Erikson*

*Peers, especially clergy peers, are enormously important for the enhancement of pastoral identity.*  
*Response Group Member*

*Positive peer relationships are essential. However, a few bitter, angry, hurting pastors can damage a peer group.*  
*Response Group Member*

While the origins of the office of public ministry of the gospel and its precise status are often subject to debate, throughout its history the church has acknowledged an office of pastoral leadership responsible for the ministry of word and sacrament. This office is unique in the church. In the Lutheran tradition the pastor, in the service of ordination, is entrusted with the responsibility for those elements that define the church: the proclaimed word and the administration of the sacraments of altar and font. These elements must be present if the church is to exist. Therefore, though the church can exist without pastors, the pastor's identity as minister of word and sacrament is integrally linked with the identity of the church as the place where the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered accordingly.

Clergy, as servants of Christ, dare never become elitist as a self-perpetuating ministerium; they do not constitute the church. Yet pastors who seek to "flesh out" the call to ordained ministry of word and sacrament may go to other clergy who are committed to guiding and sustaining one another .

The first part of this role involves ordination. While it would not be accurate to say that only other clergy ordain a pastor, the process of confirmation by peers takes a formal shape in the ordination. That confirmation lies specifically in the role of the bishop (or the bishop's representative) who represents the church and other clergy. The official mechanisms of the wider church, which include both clergy peers and lay persons, certify the individual as qualified for ordained ministry. In ordination pastors are publicly recognized and affirmed in their pastoral office by both the current Christian community and the historical tradition, represented in their peers.

Perhaps even more formative for pastoral identity is the informal confirmation by peers. This informal confirmation is shared by colleagues in context. Clergy groups, clusters, conferences and synod meetings provide the context whereby clergy interact and where informal confirmation can occur. The support and encouragement of the bishop as the official representative of the clergy also plays an important role in establishing a synodical environment for informal confirmation.

There is a mutuality in this informal peer confirmation process. Veteran clergy confirm new pastors as they engage them as peers in ministry, beginning with something as simple as a friendly first welcome. Clergy who have been around longer may need to be reminded of the importance of their welcome to new colleagues. Veteran clergy can also offer the benefit of their wisdom and experience as new pastors attempt to understand and make sense of their experiences of ministry. Clergy whose theological training is more recent may also be able to offer fresh perspectives to older clergy and provide new ways of understanding their identity as pastors in a social and church context vastly different from that of older clergy when they were ordained.

Confirmation comes in the willingness of more experienced clergy to allow those newer to the office to have input into group processes and to assume new responsibilities. The term "peer" suggests that the new pastor is recognized as an equal. Collegiality becomes a mark of the ministerium as older, more experienced peers affirm these new clergy as colleagues who have their own unique pastoral gifts to offer.

Clergy, veteran and new, share in common a unique calling. Therefore they have an interrelated vocational bond that can be replicated nowhere else. This bond between brothers and sisters in the common task of public ministry gives opportunity for common understandings and insights that clergy can receive from no other source.

### **5. Continuity with Fathers and Mothers in the Faith**

*A growing sense of continuity with significant fathers and mothers in the faith--including parents, grandparents, extended family, pastors, teachers, and including the prophets, apostles, and other women and men of the church throughout the ages who fulfilled their ministries in their time.*  
Component Five

*Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God. The*  
Epistle to the Hebrews

Identity refers to those elements in one's self that stay the same as the world around us changes. Identity is a persisting inner reality or truth that provides a continuity by which a sense of self endures. Continuity shows itself in what is meant by the word "I." "I" names what it is in a person that doesn't change over time. This past reality may be as basic as the fact that we are the same bodily person throughout life.

As Christians, however, our most significant continuity with the past is established in baptism. Baptism formally brings the individual into the divine drama of salvation. This drama has its beginning before the creation of the world and it extends to the present moment, a moment which in turn points to the promises of God for the future. In baptism we make the story of God's loving relationship with the world the framework of our own story. Through the multiple changes in life, through accidents and change, through events that confirm our mortality and heighten our anxiety, this story of God's love remains the source of our identity that allows us to live courageously.

The wonder of this divine story is that God risks entrusting divine purposes into human hands. Each person has a role to play, a calling. Many throughout history, both lay and clergy, have embraced this challenge. Baptism brings the Christian into contact with these other persons of faith, these bearers of the tradition in the drama of salvation.

We come to the font in the company of other persons, whether a sponsor who stands beside us or a parent who carries us to the font and speaks on our behalf. We are drawn into a group of people called a congregation--a community continuous with a tradition that has gathered in many different centuries and in many different places. Our identity as a Christian finds its continuity in the whole drama of God's loving care for all of creation and for each individual person.

As with all Christians, the pastor's identity includes this sense of continuity with the people of the church, both lay and ordained. With some of these the pastor may have a personal relationship: family, members of a home congregation, a confirmation pastor, a Sunday school teacher. Others may be those the pastor knows only by their words or by stories about them. The pastor, too, exists within a living tradition of faith.

In addition, the presence of the pastoral office throughout the church's history offers a further point of continuity with the tradition of pastoral identity. The pastor serves in a vocation that has been carried out by many others before and that will be filled by many more in time to come. The office of ministry, like the gospel message, is not of our making but is received from beyond ourselves through a flow of countless witnesses.

Such an affirmation is no mere dogma to be repeated blindly from generation to generation. We receive a living tradition and, true to the shape of the incarnate word, we--pastor or lay persons--each integrate this tradition with the particulars of our unique life and gifts. Like our individual identity this Christian heritage has its own dynamic continuity. The gospel remains the same across all boundaries and is a touchstone of all Christian identity.

## **6. Development of the Devotional Disciplines .**

*A growing and developing appreciation of the disciplines of prayer, scripture study, reading and reflection that daily confirms in the core of one's being the grace of God in Christ.*

*Component Six*

*Moreover, I want to point out to you a correct way of studying theology, for I have had practice in that . . . . This is the way taught by holy King David (and doubtlessly used by all the patriarchs and prophets) in the one hundred nineteenth Psalm. There you will find three rules, simply presented throughout the whole Psalm. They are Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio. Firstly, you should know that the Holy Scriptures constitute a book which turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness. . . . But kneel down in your little room [Matt. 6:6ff] and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that he through his dear Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, and give you understanding. Secondly, you should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing oral speech and literal words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you may see what the Holy Spirit means by them. . . . Thirdly, there is tentatio, Anfechtung. This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom.*

*Martin Luther*

*To preserve the silence within amid all the noise, to remain open and quiet, a moist humus in the fertile darkness where the rain falls and the grain ripens--no matter how many tramp across the parade ground in whirling dust under an arid sky.*

*Dag Hammarskjöld*

The very word "devotion" implies a *committed* encounter with the gospel. As we are devotional, we affirm that our faith life involves more than intellectual comprehension; it involves the response of one's whole self. As such, our devotional life becomes a major source of our identity. Devotional life is not the cultivation of "heart religion" over against "head religion." Such distinctions miss faith's claim on the whole person. Devotional life is a quest to be accountable with one's whole existence. Each of us bears responsibility for this accountability.

Devotional life is not an optional exercise, any more than watering a plant is optional for the plant's survival. Since the human being, individually and in community, is constantly in the midst of change and open to influences of various kinds, failure to cultivate a devotional life is to risk drifting on the tide of prevalent influences. Christians need to ask themselves: *What* will define my identity and life? If the spiritual truths of the faith are not pressed into service in answering this question, other influences will certainly invade. Scriptures often name such influences as "the world" or "worldliness."

Devotional life is, in a way, an effort to be conscious and intentional about one's Christian and pastoral identity. Devotional discipline becomes a personal directing of our faith life. Remarkably, even that directing is not ours to command; it is the province of the Holy Spirit. We can only open ourselves to the work of Spirit.

As a leader in the Christian community, pastors help others grow into a deeper life of the spirit by the example of an effective devotional life.

Prayer, study of scripture and meditation are the major components of the devotional disciplines that continue to shape Christian and pastoral identity. Scripture is the starting point for all Christian devotional life. Literature growing out of Scripture or a reflection on scripture can also enrich devotional practice. Christians will develop their own ways of enhancing devotional identity according to their own gifts and inclinations.

Devotional life need not happen only in isolation. A most effective source of devotional practice can be the worship of a small group in a collegial setting. In an atmosphere of mutual care, one another's identity and its formation become a matter of concern.

Those who gather in a small group not only support each other, but find an opportunity to learn from each other in much the way one learns from the writings of persons of faith from the past. Peers who are committed to their faith, to the development of a healthy pastoral identity, and who share perspectives from their experience can enhance the pastor's devotional life.

In the end, the responsibility for faith life, under God, rests solely with the individual called by the Spirit. God created us unique and free. That responsibility means we are accountable for what we do with God's offer of grace and the means by which it becomes accessible to us. No one can grow a deeper and more committed faith life for us. That is our own personal journey as we follow the leading of the Spirit.

## 7. Claiming the Theological Tradition of the Church

*A claiming for oneself the theological tradition of the church, not only formally but dynamically, through reading, study and reflection (both in isolation and in interaction with colleagues) that regularly informs the core of one's being as one interacts with a shifting culture and context and also increases the pastor's prophetic and priestly wisdom and skills in preaching, teaching, pastoral care and leadership*  
Component Seven

*A theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation. Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which eternal truth must be received.*  
Paul Tillich

*Likewise a pastoral orientation does not mean that one thinks as if one were a theologian, rather it is to believe that at the center of one's identity that he or she is a theologian. Again, while this may seem trite or insignificant, it implies a basic assertion about the place of theological reflection.*  
Joretta Marshall

A major demand placed on the candidate for ministry by the church is the discipline of study. Study is the means by which the pastor understands the church's heritage of faith and is able to communicate that theological heritage in a way that it becomes relevant to the present day. While the pastoral ministry does not necessarily require superior knowledge or intelligence, it does require the mastery of a certain body of knowledge. That knowledge enables a pastor to learn to think theologically and to become a representative of the church as a theologian in pastoral context.

There are professional theologians who are not pastors, but pastors must be theologically literate. That is, in addition to reciting the literature of theology and the thoughts of other theologians, they must be able to bring the truths of the tradition to bear on any situation. The pastoral vocation requires that they think and speak theologically. When they do so, they establish a theological identity. Very simply, the vocation of the pastor is to proclaim the living word to his/her context.

Even more, pastors as theologians profess the faith in theological terms that have integrity and are effective. Theological understanding alone is inadequate. As theological leaders of faith communities, pastors claim the gospel as the foundation of their own identity. The gospel as the heart and focus of pastor theologians requires that they configure their life by that gospel as they respond in belief and accept the promise of God's grace.

Preaching is one pastoral activity that has specific theological dimensions. Preaching might be called a theological address to a specific context. The preacher addresses a community of believers--believers who are, in varying degrees, committed to the gospel message. But these people also live in the secular world. As a result they may employ a variety of other interpretations to their daily lives, many only partially comprehended. The preacher must understand both worlds and seek to offer a theological vision that helps the hearers name their world theologically. This integrating vision risks moving out into the uncharted territories of this present age. The pastor risks developing sermons that connect with the ethical and moral dilemmas facing all parishioners in their daily lives.

The theological task of the pastor may involve rejecting certain “worldly” interpretations of our experience or may require the pastor to tease out the religious dimensions of our “secular” lives. The decision about what may be called for on any given trip to the pulpit cannot be looked up in a book. It falls to the theological wisdom of the pastor. This wisdom born of the study and reflection of faith links present experience with the knowledge of tradition.

Often we think of theologians as those who have mastered a collection of theological literature. Not every pastor can or will be able to take on such a task. But there is a threshold of theological understanding that must be present that will enable the pastor to function as a credible theologian of an ecclesiastical tradition in a specific context. Pastors commit themselves to continuing the conversation between theology and the current situation. That conversation implies that pastors make an effort to stay current with developments both theological and in the secular society. The theological component of pastors’ identity make it possible for them to move beyond mere reflection to challenge oppression, injustice, and the powers of darkness.

## 8. Growing Through the Crucible

*A growing ability to use, by God's grace, the crucible--the pain, suffering and trials of life and ministry with their destructive potential--as an instrument of the Holy Spirit in leading more deeply into the mysteries of life lived in dialogue with the renewing companionship of a suffering God and the communion of saints.*  
Component Eight

*Shocked shag of earth and everything thereunder  
Turned inside out--the nail-gnarled have caught Heaven  
Like a bright ball. Not in their reknit wonder,  
But in their wounds lies Christ's sprung grace engraven--  
Not in the body lighter than word spoken,  
But in the side still breached, the hands still broken.*

Vassar Miller

*Only slowly is the truth learned: Ministry "happens" most authentically in the midst of suffering and ambiguity. One's own human predicament forms part of the response of ministry. Clergy frequently delude themselves by thinking that one is prevented from genuine ministry by the underbrush of false cultural expectations, or organizational demands, and the general nitty gritty of "running a church." These excuses vanish with the realization that those very misunderstandings, intrusions, and tedious expectations present the moment and context for ministry. The dream of first removing the problem so that ministry might take place give way to the vision of robustly seizing the problem as the best way of beginning to minister. ... Only the one who has experienced the pain, the frustration, the struggle of living fully in a moment such as ours--and has both glimpsed meaning and has personally heard the word of hope--dare speak to us. Only those who have come to grips with their own loneliness are able to enter into the loneliness of another. This is not to romanticize the pain of ambiguity or loneliness; it is not an encouragement for a superficial swapping of stories of personal distress. It affirms the answer pastorally fashioned by Henri Nouwen of the minister as the one who acknowledges his or her own humanity and uses that awareness as a vehicle of ministry.*  
Search Institute

*“A person becomes a theologian by living, by dying and being damned - not by understanding, reading, and speculation.”*  
Martin Luther

The Christian belief in redemption includes a conviction that the God of Jesus Christ does not abandon us in the midst of our pain, but rather works in our lives through suffering. Suffering, in fact, “produces endurance and endurance produces character. . .” (Rom. 5:3-4). Christians are convinced that even pain results in “a good outcome,” by the grace of God. Suffering, times of personal pain and trial, can offer growth in pastoral identity.

It may be useful, in discussing suffering to look at two different kinds and sources of suffering. One type of suffering comes through the dynamics of personal growth. Human growth involves periods of disintegration of self, followed by a stronger reintegration. We call it suffering because the growth process can be quite painful. This suffering can be a normal part of personal growth and may even be cultivated in a controlled setting under the guidance of a concerned person with appropriate skills and wisdom. Such suffering is often redeemed by the growth it produces. The early years of ministry that cause pastors to redefine their call as they establish themselves will force this kind of growth.

Another crisis caused by suffering for the pastor can result from encountering first hand the world’s evil. Pastors often have to deal with the results of the cruelty of one individual against another--crime, employment injustice, false accusations, physical and sexual abuse. In other cases they are confronted with human forces, sometimes demonic, beyond the control of the individual. Forces like wars, economic change and social trends produce real human pain. They can also cause deep distress for pastors. Natural events--illness, accident and death--often invade the pastor’s life and can call into question the reliability of our world and even the reliability of God. Questions around human suffering can shake a pastors’ identity to its depths, especially when suffering affects the lives of people they have learned to know and love.

The personal suffering caused by human suffering is common to first-call clergy. A caring colleague group or a wise and sensitive mentor is a gift of grace at times like these when the pastor is in need of a pastor.

When suffering invades, the risk of despair and questions of faith and vocation can be intensified for the pastor. However, even this suffering can deepen and strengthen identity when it is engaged in light of the suffering of Christ and dealt with according to the promises of God. The cross (“theology of the cross”) tells us that much of human life will involve suffering in some measure like Christ’s suffering on the cross. Such a view stands opposed to those who want to see Christian life as perpetual victory that overcomes all pain and suffering (“theology of glory”). A realistic view of human suffering in no way celebrates that suffering, nor does it recommend that we seek out suffering as a tool for deepening faith. Rather, this view seeks to be honest about suffering and about the fact that unlike human responses, God does not flee from suffering.

All suffering presents a challenge to Christian faith. It marks a significant opportunity for a pastor to respond and to care for those who endure such pain. Faced with evil and its results we claim, by the grace of God, God’s promises of presence and power through Christ’s redemption. The God who created the world out of a formless void of chaos and who raised Jesus up after the tragedy of the cross can also bring goodness out of our suffering, no matter how meaningless it might otherwise appear.

Suffering need not be faced alone. Christians understand suffering within a community that accepts God's message of redemption and refuses the human tendency to flee or ignore suffering. A faithful community cannot reject any person afflicted, nor will it offer hollow platitudes that mock real comfort. The faithful community accepts the reality of suffering and seeks to respond with actions intended to eliminate the causes of suffering when possible. The faith community offers comfort and help for those who suffer from forces beyond any one's control. A faithful community's honesty grows out of a faith-memory of the cross with all of its oppression, violence and pain. Even more, this community confesses faith in a God who suffers as we suffer.

The pastor, as leader of a faithful community, understands the power of suffering and the potential for good and ill that suffering brings. More importantly, pastors who confront the pain in their own lives are able honestly to face pain in the lives of others.

### 9. Identity Development as a Pilgrimage

*A growing realization that life and ministry is a pilgrimage; pastoral identity exists in a state of flux, with growth and development that is in continuity with one's personal past, the past of the communion of saints and a steady movement with trust and hope into the uncertain future.*

*Component Nine*

*The third aspect of consciousness of self is based on a sense of identity. One knows that he remains the same person through time, despite gross physical and mental changes from infancy to old age. On account of this identity one can make statements like Paul's famous words: When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. (I Corinthians 13:11) He was aware of being the same Paul of Tarsus throughout his past and in the present and on to the future until his demise, no matter what drastic changes might occur in his body or mind. Paul's case is interesting also because he had an incisive conversion experience on account of which he felt a sufficient difference between his old self and his new self to name them distinctly.*

*Paul Pruyser*

*In other words, the establishment of ego synchronicity, or ego identity, is an ongoing task. This is particularly important given the middle aged phenomenon of burn-out in most parish clergy.*

*Joretta Marshall*

*People I think have arrived are:*

- *those who know they haven't*
- *are willing to admit their own errors*
- *their central joy is in the gospel*
- *respond "yes" to life*
- *know how little they know about and believe in God*

*First-Call Pastor*

Seeing the process of pastoral identity as a pilgrimage expands our exploration. Because identity is a dynamic interaction between continuity and change, understanding the pastoral task as a pilgrimage implies an identity that features both commitment and openness. Any pilgrimage involves a goal and a process for reaching that goal. The pilgrim has made a conscious choice about priorities and directions, and has made a commitment to expending the necessary effort to achieve the goal. However, a pilgrimage of growth requires openness to events and to change.

Life itself is change. Daily we make decisions, react to circumstances, come to new understandings, develop new relationships. Constant change means that identity itself is not static; it is not achieved once then locked into place for good. Human identity is a dynamic process. The essence of a person's identity endures, but it is not simply a rigidity of patterns of behavior. Identity is a complex continuity of change.

As a pilgrimage, identity development has no clearly discernible conclusions. Further, the continuity amid change that adults experience is different from earlier adolescent identity formation. The adult pilgrimage into identity requires that we deal with both the trauma and discovery that are a part of our pilgrimage. The complexity of identity reflects what science writer James Gleick calls "the messy multiplicity of experience." That identity exists at all is the result of grace experienced in the midst of new and demanding life experiences. In this sense the true goal of the pilgrimage of faith and pastoral identity is to live in light of the grace of God, trusting in that grace rather than in one's own ability to secure one's existence. The gratuitous nature of all life and identity is what it means to say that identity is a pilgrimage.

For the pastor the pilgrimage to identity calls for a cultivated openness to whatever might come. While struggling with this requirement may be normal, fear of change and clinging to the past can be a danger. Openness to change means that we seek out those things that will challenge us and force us to expand our growing sense of identity. We prepare ourselves through reading; we gather new information; we interact with people of all ages; we relate cross-culturally to different ethnic groups and socio-economic subcultures. The alternative to the ability to welcome change is stagnation, irrelevance, and susceptibility to burnout.

We can learn about identity development from other disciplines as well. While not employing the pilgrim metaphor, researchers in teacher education and development have given much thought to the various stages that teachers experience as they start their vocations. Five developmental stages are identified, each with its own characteristics, appropriate supports and appropriate challenges. It appears that many of the stages from these studies also relate to the developmental stages in the growth of pastoral identity. (See Appendix A for a rendition of these stages from Mary Field Belinky, et.al. Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind)

The image of pilgrimage suggests that as one travels, events along the way offer opportunities to build new meaning. Newness and growth make the journey itself fascinating, even though it remains incomplete. As pilgrimage, pastoral identity is never fully achieved; rather it is shaped by growth and by a vision of the future.

Even though the growth of identity results from events and change, pastoral identity also requires a dynamic continuity with the past. Christians find continuity in God's faithfulness as it is revealed in the story of salvation—a story that becomes a part of one's individual story. Identity also involves a continuity with some future goal. Identity lives expectantly. As such, an emerging identity involves trust. Christians lodge their trust in the promise that God's grace will always meet us along the way, enriching and ennobling our lives. The story of salvation does not stop but continues into the future. Therefore identity looks forward and backward at the same time.

The pilgrim has a sense that the goal of the journey will justify the journey. The pastor understands that identity is never perfected, that growth always continues.

### V. *Caveate Emptor*

*But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.*  
1 Corinthians 4:7

*Let nobody suppose that he has tasted the Holy Scriptures sufficiently unless he has ruled over the churches with the prophets for a hundred years. Therefore there is something wonderful, first about John the Baptist; second about Christ; third about the apostles. Lay not your hands on this divine Aenid, but bow before it, adore its every trace. We are beggars. That is true.*

*Martin Luther*

Our confidence that we are on the right path toward pastoral identity must not be confused with a software program that guarantees the desired outcome. Like Erik Erikson's concept of identity, even after this probing and reflecting, pastoral identity still remains an elusive notion. Like the gospel Paul talks about, at best it is in earthen jars. The power belongs to God. Like Luther's last tribute to the holy Scriptures, we never sufficiently taste it. In the end pastoral identity remains a gift of grace not to be seized directly but received gratefully. In some ways our pursuit of it is like the pursuit of the Holy Grail. The poet Karl Immerman sees grace embodied in the story of the Holy Grail. (Note dated language)

Steadfast by my own law I take my stand,  
In vain ye seek me, yea,  
The wanderer who doth my temple find,  
Was sought by me.  
What would the Holy be could it be gained?--  
The infinite, if, as we strive and yearn,  
By what is finite it could be attained?  
No, the inevitable clasps me, stern  
Chains formed of steel grip hold of me--  
Man's part--the only one we can discern--  
Is to perceive he is elect, yes, he!

To firmly grasp pastoral identity as a personal possession may be like pursuing the Holy Grail. Pastoral identity, as all gifts of grace, cannot be captured, programmed and packaged, but the various components that feed into it can and need ever to be sustained, enhanced, cultivated and refined. This is the primary task before us.

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WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING I  
 Characteristics of the Stages

Epistemological Position	Silence	Received Knowledge	Subjective Knowledge	Procedural Knowledge	Constructed Knowledge
<b>The Voice Metaphor</b>	No Voice "Deaf and Dumb"	Enduring voices of others	The inner voice	The Voice of Reason	Integrating the Voices
<b>Way of Knowing</b>	Don't know, can't understand the language. Words are weapons used against her. Can't see self as "knowing." Subject to whims of external authority	Know by listening. Can learn from authority. Concrete, dualistic notion of reality. Open to others' knowledge but no confidence to speak. No tolerance for ambiguity.	Knowledge comes from within- the inalienable gut. Rejects external authority. Subjective knowledge intuitively known.	Knowledge equals to an authority's. But "gut" may deceive. Some truths truer than others. Experts valued. More objective, there are guidelines worth using. Practical pragmatic, problem solvers.	Women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing.
<b>Authority</b>	All-powerful, wordless authorities. Obey without understanding.	Authorities all-knowing. They get their knowledge from even higher authorities. Authorities' truth is absolute.	Trust authority is self. Rejection of failed, usually male, authority has caused to turn to self or other women for authority.	Values the authority's model. "Methodology" may put form over content. Can live with ambiguity but one authority likely to be greater.	Others and self. To be an authority, must honor the complexity of the issue. Can live with ambiguity. Truth is a process in which the knower participates.
<b>Self</b>	Identify rests with others. But others have not communicated. Defined by what they do or where they are.	Look to others for self knowledge. Try hard to live up to others' image of them. Self defined by social expectations.	A quest inward for self. Rejection of claims of others in favor of doing what's right for self. Still invested in relationships but more self-centered.	Separate or connected knowers. Separate-autonomous, using the model of knowing but still apart. Connected-based in experiencing, empathy.	The growing self. "Passionate knowing" weaving passions into intellectual. Connectedness possible despite great diversity. True intimacy with self and others.
<b>Culture of Embeddedness Its Impact</b>	System has failed to "give voice." Must build language bridge.	Be true authority. Encourage self-knowing	Failed marriages, sexual abuse as children, oppression. Must rebuild trust in others as well as self.	Need models true to women's perspectives. Encourage integration of intuitive and rational.	Problem: Society that doesn't listen or heed. Need for "real talk," that is cooperative and respectful.
<b>Group Characteristics</b>	Small group, underprivileged, various ages.	Mixed group: age, social class, education.	Largest group-75 of the 135 interviewed. Half have been sexually abused as children (34). 21 (30%) victims of incest. Various ages.	Mostly privileged, bright, white, young (late teens to mid 20's). Most in college or graduates.	Smallest group. Mostly highly educated