

## Models

by Rev. Joe Connolly

“I am the model shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me.” — John 10:14.

Last week your friend and mine, the Rev. Mr. David Spiegel of the First Baptist Church across the street, successfully defended his dissertation in a Doctor of Ministry program at New Brunswick Seminary in New Jersey. Let it be known that from this time forward David is no longer to be called the Rev. Mr. David Spiegel. David is to be called the Rev. Dr. David Spiegel.

The subject of David’s dissertation is hospital chaplaincy and how the work of chaplaincy applies to the local church and local community, especially in a rural setting. Why was this a valid topic for a doctoral dissertation?

I have mentioned what I am about to say before. It bears repeating. These days most of us who graduate from ‘Main Line Seminaries’ and get ordained usually need to have a course called C.P.E.— Clinical Pastoral Education.

C.P.E. is most often conducted at hospitals or jails or nursing facilities. It consists of at least 400 hours of classroom and clinical work with those two areas— classroom and clinical— splitting that 400 hours in roughly equal portions.

Generally, the aforementioned facilities cooperate with the seminaries. Hence, 3 credit hours can be assigned toward the Master of Divinity Degree for that work. To be clear, 400 hours of work is nearly three times more work than the average 3 credit seminary course.

One thing David tried to stress in the dissertation was the importance for the local church to have a pastor with C.P.E. training. It is especially important in a rural setting such as ours since many rural hospitals such as ours do not have a paid chaplain. Indeed, one thing David did was consult with the leadership at Chenango Memorial Hospital to help them be aware of what C.P.E. training means in a rural setting.

To be clear, there are standards for hospitals about maintaining a paid chaplain. But one of those standards says size matters. If the hospital is small, it does not need a paid chaplain on staff.

That comes back to the point as to why it is a good idea for the local rural Main Line church to have a pastor with formal chaplaincy training. Main Line churches usually require C.P.E. for ordination. Most other churches do not require it. Trained pastors are an asset for the church and an asset for community.

That is, I think, important information. And that brings me to a story about my Clinical Pastoral Education course at Eastern Maine Medical Center, Bangor, Maine.

And to prove a point— a couple of years ago Eastern Maine Medical eliminated its paid chaplain. Standards shifted. Despite being a good sized hospital, Eastern Maine was no longer large enough to have a paid chaplain. It became an extra expense in the eyes of bean counters; the position was eliminated.

Back to my course: I learned a number of valuable lessons. Among them was the need to be present to the person being visited. Leave your baggage— everyone has baggage; no one is immune from that— leave your baggage at the door.

Therefore, do not impose your theology on anyone else. And I know because I read a draft of the dissertation, a

major point David made was C.P.E. helps you with the training necessary to reenforce the idea that you are *not* there to impose your theology. You see, whether or not we admit it, everyone has their own theology. As a chaplain and even as a pastor, it is not your job to tell someone their theology is wrong or misguided. It is, after all, their theology not yours. (Slight pause.)

My professor for Clinical Pastoral Education was the Rev. Dr. Rex Garrett. On the first day in class we had a discussion about the career of a pastor.

Note: this was not about the call to be a pastor. Rex was trying to concentrate on the practical, the career. One thing he said that day has always stuck with me. A pastor works in the only profession, said he, where ‘you are not allowed to make a mistake.’

I think Rex was overstating the case on purpose because he took the sting off that just a little bit since he then said, ‘you will, of course, make mistakes.’ Then he took the sting off that just a little more by saying one of the things a C.P.E. course is about is understanding our mistakes and then doing better.

You see a chaplain, a pastor will face similar situations over time. And one thing to be learned in C.P.E. is you are not perfect (if you did not know that already). Hence, there is a need to examine each situation you face and having lived through it, ask one question. ‘How can I handle that better the next time?’ (Slight pause.)

These words are recorded in the Gospel According to the School of John: “I am the model shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me.” (Slight pause.)

As I said, Rex was overstating the case in saying a pastor is not allowed to make a mistake. And yes, there *is* another, perhaps more accurate way to address what pastors do.

There is an expectation that a pastor will be a model. And what is it a pastor tries to model? A pastor tries to model ministry. (Slight pause.)

When the reading from John was introduced you heard it said an accurate translation is not that Jesus is a “Good Shepherd.” An accurate translation says Jesus is a “model shepherd” or “true shepherd.”

I think a lot of learning goes on in C.P.E. about how to model ministry. Certainly one thing the student learns is modeling ministry is not about me, the individual, not about the pastor, the chaplain. Modeling ministry is about practicing Christianity, the practice of Christianity.

So, how does that happen? Indeed, how do we how do all of us, the Congregation, model ministry, practice Christianity? (Slight pause.)

As a pastor here in this place for 22 plus years, let me tell you something I’ve seen. Someone from out of town will come to a Sunday worship— a relative, a friend— visitors to Norwich who, at best, might be back sporadically.

As you know, I greet people at the door at the end of a service. Often one of these visitors will say, “I’m just visiting but I have to tell you the people at this church are so welcoming, so friendly.” FYI, that happened just two weeks ago yet again. It’s happened many times.

In fact, I saw that very same thing last week when we had our regular service of worship over at Chenango Valley Home. Generally when I do a service at Chenango Valley home the residents remain seated when it

comes time to pass the peace.

And last Sunday when it came time to pass the peace the residents remained seated. But our members, the members of this congregation, leaped to their feet, went around to the residents, shook their hands, greeted the residents.

I watched the faces of the residents light up. They smiled. And as I greeted the residents at the end of the service I was told how wonderful the people of our church are and how wonderful the service was.

Frankly, I nearly cried when the peace was being passed because I realized what was happening. I was witnessing the ministry of this Congregation as we moved out into the greater community. I was watching Christianity being modeled. (Slight pause.)

Sometimes I say whoever sits in the Pastor's seat— me or anyone else— has a different perspective on things than members of the laity. That's because what I am about to say might *not* happen to lay members of this church or lay members of any church. But it does happen to clergy.

You see, when I'm out in our community people tell me how wonderful we are, how wonderful you are, what our members do in and do for the greater community. Sometimes they come across a room, go out of their way to tell me that.

And I cannot begin to describe what people tell me about what our music ministry means to this community. And I cannot begin to describe what people tell me about what our philanthropy means to this community. And I cannot begin to describe what people tell me about what our openness means to this community. (Slight pause.)

All of which is to say yes, you— this congregation— does ministry inside these walls, here in this place. And you— this congregation— does ministry outside these walls. So yes, you know how to model ministry.

And indeed, today's Gospel passage also addresses what modeling ministry can do. (Quote:) "There are other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must lead them also. And they will hear my voice. And then there will be one flock, one shepherd." (Slight pause.)

One flock— we are all one with God. And that we are all one is a core theological claim of our denomination and of this congregation.

So therefore, yes— you are following the example of Jesus. And I know following the model Jesus set is important because the Gospel According to the School of John tells us Jesus is a model Shepherd. Amen.

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**ENDPIECE:** It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Choral Response and Benediction. This is an précis of what was said: "Sometimes pithy sayings make sense; sometimes they don't. This one from author Karen Salmansohn seems to work for me. (Quote:) "Be the reason someone believes in the goodness of people." I think the way we are the reason someone that believes in the goodness of people is we model ministry."

**BENEDICTION:** We are invited to make God's house our home. We are equipped by the grace of God to help

others on their journeys. God leads us beside still waters and restores our soul. God's love in Jesus, the Christ, has blessed us and we shall dwell in the house of the true shepherd. Amen.