

*Pastor's Papers* | Ronald H. Gann  
Ministry/Church

***My Philosophy Of Ministry***  
Original Essay | Ordination Thesis

182 Rockingham Road  
Londonderry, NH 03053  
(603) 759-7120 | office@bridgewaychristianchurch.org



www.bridgewaychristianchurch.org

Perhaps there is no greater barrier to *ecclesiastical* unity, particularly among the clergy, than the longstanding debate over pastoral ministry. How a pastor *instructs* his sheep, *inspires* his co-leaders, *illuminates* Scripture, *imposes* his vision, *invokes* disciplinary action, and *implements* church programs and ministries continues to sow seeds of discord between otherwise likeminded leaders. Notwithstanding our mystical union in Christ, the pastorate is rife with divergent philosophies.

Some ministers, for example, subscribe to a **seeker-sensitive philosophy** (which showcases the performance arts and “felt-needs homilies”<sup>1</sup> as a means of achieving *evangelistic growth*). Others adhere to a **marketing philosophy** (which emphasizes community outreach and “Madison Avenue” advertising as a means of attaining *numerical growth*). And still others adhere to an **expositional philosophy** (which focuses on explaining the meaning of Scripture in its historical and grammatical context in effort to enhance *spiritual growth*). In a nutshell, one philosophy caters to the un-churched (seeker-sensitive), another to the community at large (marketing), and the other still to believers (expositional). And these are just a few of the myriad of models at play in today’s evangelical church. Often referred to as a *philosophy of ministry*, there is no shortage of alternatives from which a pastor can choose. And what he chooses will determine not only *what* he preaches from the pulpit but *how* he governs behind his desk.

In defining my pastoral philosophy of ministry, I believe that it is vital that we first define our terms. A philosophy of ministry, in my own words, is an organized statement of unalterable principles for *why* the local church exists and *how* it is to serve the Lord. Specific to the pastorate, it is a blueprint that governs how a pastor should conduct his ministry in his combined office as leader, servant, teacher, shepherd, vision-caster, and principle gatekeeper of the congregation.

Ecclesiastically, my philosophy of ministry consists of three core values (upon which a church should stand), along with seven vision points (for which a church should strive), and seven mission points (by which a church should operate). Pastorally, it also includes four practical points (to which a pastor should aspire). Although far from exhaustive, this ordination paper endeavors to expound briefly upon each criterion as they relate to my personal philosophy of ministry.

### **Three Core Values**

The three core values that comprise my personal philosophy of ministry, and upon which I stake my ground, are: (1) **Scripture-Focused**; (2) **God-Centered**; (3) and **Believer-Oriented**. While seemingly conventional, they are anything but standard fare in contemporary evangelicalism.<sup>2</sup> I submit that when these three core values are adopted in a church and enforced by the pastoral leadership, the church will better honor God (in its polity and power) and the sheep (in its service and stewardship).

- **Scripture-Focused:** The standard bearer for a church must be the Bible. As the inspired Word of God, we are to study its history, teach its theology, uphold its eternal truths, and apply its instructions, exhortations, and precepts. To that end, I believe that it is through a steady diet of expository preaching on Sunday morning that a church maintains its allegiance to, and focus on, the revealed will of God.
- **God-Centered:** The primary focus of a church must be the adoration of God. Through song, supplication, and study, the church is to honor God, first and foremost, for who He is and what He has done. The Sunday service should be about God (rather than us); His glory (rather than our feelings); His Word (rather than our opinions); His agenda (rather than our preferences); and His people (rather than unbelievers)—to the praise of His glory.
- **Believer-Oriented:** The intended target audience for a church must be those who confess faith in Jesus Christ. While evangelizing non-Christians is commanded in Scripture, and is therefore to be obeyed, I believe that the local fellowship on Sunday morning is to be geared principally to, and consist primarily of, believers in Jesus Christ.

These three core values—**Scripture-Focused**, **God-Centered**, and **Believer-Oriented**—are the grid by which my philosophy of ministry is mapped.<sup>3</sup> Not unlike the *Five Solas*<sup>4</sup> of the Protestant Reformation (to which I eagerly subscribe), they are different sides of the same coin—which is to say, each core value is systematically intertwined and inter-dependent. A church cannot focus on Scripture if it is not also centered on God. Likewise, a church cannot effectively minister to believers if it is not first devoted to Scripture. To be God-centric is to therefore be Scripture-centric, and to be Scripture-centric is to thus be believer-centric.

### Seven Vision Points

The seven vision points that constitute my vision for a church, and thereby inform my pastoral philosophy of ministry, are: (1) **Prayer**; (2) **Faith**; (3) **Family**; (4) **Fellowship**; (5) **Service**; (6) **Study**; and (7) **Outreach**. I submit that when

these seven vision points are adopted in a church and modeled by the pastoral leadership, the church will invite divine blessing and incur spiritual victory.

These seven vision points, while mutually exclusive, find common ground in Jesus Christ. For example, by **Prayer**, I mean that a church should be committed to growing in communion *with* Christ, both corporately and individually. By **Faith**, I mean that a church should seek to stand unwavering *on* Christ, particularly in terms of budget planning, church discipline, and ministry development. By **Family**, I mean that a church should exceed in loving one another *for* Christ, especially “the least of these” among us (Matthew 25:45). By **Fellowship**, I mean that a church should enjoy each other *like* Christ, in that we are to be “devoted to ... the saints” (1 Corinthians 16:15). By **Service**, I mean that a church should give to one another as *unto* Christ, to include our time, talents, and tender. By **Study**, I mean that a church should learn and apply the wisdom that comes *from* Christ. And, lastly, by **Outreach**, I mean that a church should proclaim “so great a salvation” (Hebrews 2:3) that is found only *in* Christ.

These seven vision points are not my own; rather I have extrapolated them from the inspired words of Luke in Acts 2:42. In that particular text Luke sounds the very battle-cry from which the Church Militant receives her universal mandate. It reads as follows:

And they devoted themselves to the *apostles’ teaching* and the *fellowship*, to the *breaking of bread* and the *prayers* (Acts 2:42, emphasis added).

In other words, if we are to mimic the apostolic church in our philosophy of ministry, we must advocate the exposition and study of Scripture (“the apostles’ teaching”), as well as corporate fellowship and sacramental worship (“fellowship,” “breaking of bread,” and “the prayers”) as the key ingredients for a Bible-driven, Spirit-filled church. On this point there can be no compromise.

While no church is immaculate in its practice and polity, and no pastor is infallible in his guidance and governance, any pastoral philosophy of ministry that is devoid of these seven vision points—**Prayer, Faith, Family, Fellowship, Service, Study, and Outreach**—does a disservice to the community (in which a pastor labors) and the congregation (whom he serves). My philosophy of ministry therefore champions these seven vision points as essential components to effective pastoral ministry.<sup>5</sup>

### **Seven Mission Points**

**W**hereas a vision statement is a brief statement that promotes the *purpose* of an organization, the mission statement, in contrast, details the *means* by which that vision is accomplished. A pastor’s personal vision is just as integral to his philosophy of ministry as are the steps he takes to accomplish it. Having noted already the core values and vision points that comprise my pastoral philosophy of ministry, it is imperative to also enumerate the seven mission points necessary to bring the vision to fruition.

The seven mission points that underpin my philosophy of ministry are as follows: (1) **Exalt**; (2) **Exposit**; (3) **Examine**; (4) **Esteem**; (5) **Edify**; (6) **Excel**; and (7) **Evangelize**. It is only when these seven mission points are faithfully exercised that the seven vision points can be fully realized.

Similar to the aforesaid vision points, the seven mission points in my philosophy of ministry form a chain of command. By **Exalt**, I mean that it should be a pastor's mission to uplift the name of Jesus Christ at all times and in all settings. By **Exposit**, I mean that a pastor should make it his mission to teach the historical, grammatical, and theological meaning of the New Testament, preferably verse by verse and chapter by chapter. By **Examine**, I mean that a pastor should routinely give his attention to the sacraments of baptism and communion. By **Esteem**, I mean that a pastor should revere, as well as draw upon, the annals of church history in homage to those who have gone on before us (and upon whose shoulders we stand). By **Edify**, I mean that while a pastor's first priority is to glorify God in all that he does, the education of the saints under him must come second. By **Excel**, I mean that a pastor's mission is to stand for truth and advance (excel) a biblical worldview amid an increasingly secularized church. Finally, by **Evangelize**, I mean that a pastor is to make every effort within his sphere of influence to reach the unsaved in his community.<sup>6</sup>

With these seven mission points duly noted—**Exalt**, **Exposit**, **Examine**, **Esteem**, **Edify**, **Excel**, and **Evangelize**—it begs the question: *How exactly are these mission points a means to an end?* Or, more specifically, how do these seven mission points bring about the aforementioned seven vision points (whereby a church will shine in **Prayer**, **Faith**, **Family**, **Fellowship**, **Service**, **Study**, and **Outreach**)?

The answer is as self-evident, I suppose, as it is open to interpretation. I am of the opinion that when a pastor focuses on the exposition of Scripture, and peppers his expository teaching with antecedents from church history, the sheep under him will cultivate a ravenous appetite for deeper Bible study (i.e. EXPOSIT + ESTEEM = STUDY). In the same way, when a pastor routinely examines the sacraments and exalts God from the pulpit, the church will inevitably mature into a body of faith that is both worshipful and prayerful (i.e. EXALT + EXAMINE = PRAYER and FAITH). Likewise, when a pastor successfully edifies his congregation through sound teaching, loving relationships, and rich fellowship, a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction will blossom among the laity (i.e. EDIFY = FAMILY and FELLOWSHIP). Lastly, when a pastor excels a Christian worldview and biblical mindset, coupled with an earnest desire to promote each in the church, those in attendance (whether redeemed or not) will be inclined to revisit their religious beliefs and personal politics (i.e. EXCEL + EVANGELIZE = OUTREACH).

In summary, these seven mission points—**Exalt**, **Exposit**, **Examine**, **Esteem**, **Edify**, **Excel**, and **Evangelize** (all of which culminate in the seven vision points—**Prayer**, **Faith**, **Family**, **Fellowship**, **Service**, **Study**, and **Outreach**) results in a philosophy of ministry that is both biblical and effective. Moreover, when the three core values—**Scripture-Focused**, **God-Centered**, and **Believer-Oriented**—are added to the paradigm, the foundation for my philosophy of ministry is fully formed. And it is upon this foundation that a church—and the pastors who lead it—must earnestly and steadfastly stand.

## **Four Practical Points**

**B**eyond textbooks and mere academics, my philosophy of ministry, particularly as it relates to pastoring, has been polished by the aerosol of experience. It has been forged and fashioned, tested and tried, and edited and experimented upon in the laboratory of life.

To varying degrees of success, my philosophy of ministry has informed the manner in which I govern (as pastor and elder), proclaim the Bible (as teacher and preacher), and write and study (as author and essayist). It has, in a manner of speaking, been “put to the proof” through trial and error in the ministry of hard knocks. And in so doing, I am convinced more than ever that a pastor must be a man who expresses and exercises uncommon skills rare among common churchmen.

There are four practical points expected of a pastor, at least insofar as I am concerned, that must be brought to bear in a biblical philosophy of ministry. They are non-negotiable essentials. These points of application include, but are not limited to (1) **Teaching/Preaching**; (2) **Leadership**; (3) **Shepherding**; and (4) **Counseling**. I submit that when these four practical points are standardized in a church—and exhibited among the pastors who lead it—the church will reap a spiritual windfall.

### **1. Teaching/Preaching**

God requires that His overseers in the church be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). By definition, a teacher/preacher is one who demonstrates the ability to persuasively and winsomely communicate the Word of God in such a way that he instructs others in a proper understanding of Scripture and sound doctrine. He must be suitably gifted in the art of oratory and capable of expositing the biblical text, “making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people [can] understand what [is] being read” (Nehemiah 8:8). To that end, a teacher/preacher ought to promote a high view of Scripture<sup>7</sup>—both in the pulpit and in polity—and uphold the exposition of “the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42) as the paramount reason that the church congregates together (second only to the worship and adoration of God).

Moreover, in terms of educating and enlightening, my philosophy of ministry envisions a teacher/preacher who delights in instructing the uninformed and correcting those who stray from biblical truth. He does not introduce new revelations or doctrines contrary to what Scripture teaches nor does he go beyond what the universal Church has historically confessed in its catechisms. It is because he is a mature man of God that he will not compromise Scripture but dissects the Word of God with thoughtfulness, studiousness, eloquence, and diligence.

### **2. Leadership**

The clear implication of Scripture is that overseers in the church are men who exhibit proven leadership ability (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). By definition, a leader is one who assumes responsibility for the overall ministry of the church, particularly in the office of

the pastorate, and takes ownership of its vision and mission, to include the exercise of church discipline. Moreover, a leader influences God's people to such a degree that it brings them into a deeper relationship with Christ and with each other.

Leaders, according to my philosophy of ministry, must not only demonstrate wisdom and discernment in their decision-making but also an attitude of servitude toward others, especially to those directly under them (Matthew 20:26-28 cf. 25:31-46). In other words, ministry leaders are those who *love* with authority (those whom they serve) rather than *lord* their authority (over those whom they lead); they *do* unto others rather than *dictate* to all. A pastor, therefore, should be a leader who sets an example—theologically, morally, and practically—for others to eagerly follow.

### 3. Shepherding

Synonymous with pastoral oversight is the art of shepherding (1 Peter 5:2). By definition, a shepherd is one who provides *spiritual* counsel, *scriptural* support, *sensitive* care, and *selfless* attention to the flock of God. More specifically, it, involves three principle disciplines:

- **Knowing the Sheep.** Jesus said of his Father, “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3). When God gathers His sheep, Christ leads on ahead, “and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (v. 4). A dutiful shepherd, therefore, knows his sheep and leads them lovingly and safeguards them ferociously. Moreover, a shepherd identifies the “stragglers” in his herd and makes every effort to lead them back into the safe confines and fellowship of the sheepfold.
- **Feeding the Sheep.** Scripture places a premium on an overseer's ability to teach and preach. So much so, in fact, that Jesus required it of Peter as a condition for his reinstatement (John 21:15-20). Shepherds, consequently, must be equipped to teach the Bible, conducive to their individual gifting and personality strengths. A shepherd's greatest strong suit is his ability to biblically nourish, in the pasture of God's Word, those suffering from spiritual malnutrition.
- **Overseeing the Sheep.** Oversight is a biblical prerequisite for a pastoral shepherd. It requires the *vigilance* of a watchman standing guard at night and the *discipline* of a soldier in the trenches of war. An overseer must protect his flock from the ravenous wolves (false teachers) that abound and “the irreverent babble and contradictions” that they spew (1 Timothy 6:20).

In brief, my philosophy of ministry maintains that a shepherd is a man who is uniquely called and appointed by God to especially care for God's people. He actively seeks to *engage* the flock (shepherd over), *empathize* with the flock (care for), *educate* the flock (teach/preach to), *enjoy* the flock (fellowship with), *escort* the flock (lead them), and *enforce* the flock (protect them).

#### 4. Counseling

Perhaps no other principle in my philosophy of ministry is as scandalous as my view concerning Nouthetic counseling.<sup>8</sup> Simply stated, I maintain that Jesus Christ, through the Word of God, is wholly sufficient to combat the common ailments that emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically beset sinful men. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the Word of God “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). These two words, “thoughts” and “attitudes,” cover the motivations of man and his deepest values. God’s Word, we are told, is fully capable of passing judgment on the most hinder parts of human psychosis. It therefore goes without saying that when counseling from the office of the pastorate, a pastor must allow the Bible to speak for itself as the final court of arbitration.

Modern psychology, both secular and so-called Christian, is culpable at times of devaluing the power of Christ as the healing balm for spiritual neurosis while simultaneously over-valuing the wisdom of carnal men. In certain contexts, the Bible has been replaced with the journals of pop-psychiatry—even in the church! However, notwithstanding dissociative disorders and clinically-diagnosed mental illnesses, any philosophy of ministry that suggests that the wisdom of God’s Word is insufficient to administer to depressed or anxious people is rank blasphemy.<sup>9</sup>

My philosophy of ministry maintains that a pastor who teaches, leads, and shepherds must also be equipped to counsel from the Bible and apply its truths to the significant problems and daily challenges that afflict his congregation. We offer an all-sufficient Christ who is the source of all wisdom and spiritual healing; so it is to him and primarily to his Word that we must point a person in the midst their emotional despair.

#### Conclusion

**M**y philosophy of ministry, although somewhat formulaic in outline, is neither radical in principle nor revolutionary in application. It is a point of view that maintains and sustains a high view of evangelical principles as well as an entrenched commitment to Scripture and the God it proclaims. What is more, it is a philosophy of ministry that stands on the shoulders of Protestant titans of the past who have graced the corridors of church history and shed their blood in remonstrance to Rome so that we might freely conduct ministry in the manner that the Bible prescribes.

We owe it to our Protestant forefathers, including the countless saints who have gone on before and since, to carry the baton of evangelicalism; to be a **God-Centered, Scripture-Focused, and Believer-Oriented** church, equipped with visionaries skilled at **teaching/preaching, leading, shepherding, and counseling** and who pursue with a fever pitch **Prayer** (growing in communion *with* Christ), **Faith** (standing unwavering *on* Christ), **Family** (loving each other *for* Christ), **Fellowship** (enjoying each other *like* Christ), **Service** (giving to one another as *unto* Christ), **Study** (applying the wisdom that comes *from* Christ), and **Outreach** (proclaiming salvation only *in* Christ). When we achieve that end, I stand convinced that the local church will complete its mission in becoming a congregation that **Exalts** (Jesus Christ), **Exposits** (the

Scriptures), **Examines** (the sacraments), **Esteems** (Church history), **Edifies** (the saints), **Excels** (a Christian worldview), and **Evangelizes** (the unsaved).

My challenge to the Church of Jesus Christ, both local and universal, is to do just that—to *be* the Body of Christ from the shoulders down, with Christ as our head; a living organism that unreservedly puts into practice a *biblical* philosophy of ministry. If we are faithful to do so, then we as a church will hold in our possession a surefire compass that will guide our steps during the blackest nights of ministry, and lead us home safely at the dawn of a new day.

—Ronald H. Gann

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<sup>1</sup> “Felt-needs” are largely seen as the issues and questions that face the common person—such as career, family, relationships, etc.—and are therefore front and center in every seeker-pastor’s message; designed to help a person navigate through life more effectively. Douglas Webster correctly writes, “Topics are carefully selected to stress the personal over the doctrinal, and the relational over the [theologically] abstract” (John H. Armstrong; Reformation & Revival Ministries, Inc.; Vol. 3, No. 3, May-June 1994; as cited at [www.brftwitness.org](http://www.brftwitness.org)).

<sup>2</sup> For more on this topic, see my book *Fa\$T-Food Churchianity: A Critical Assessment of Church Ministry in America*; Ronald H. Gann (Aventine Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> These three core values have been successfully adopted and applied in the church I currently pastor. (See <http://www.bridgewaychristianchurch.org/ntframes/Purpose.html>).

<sup>4</sup> The “Five Solas” is a term used to designate five great foundational rallying cries of the Protestant Reformers. They are as follows: “Sola Scriptura” (Scripture Alone); “Sola Gratia” (Grace Alone); “Sola Fide” (Faith Alone); “Solus Christus” (Christ Alone); and “Soli Deo Gloria” (To God Alone Be Glory).

<sup>5</sup> These seven vision points have been successfully adopted and applied in the church I currently pastor. (See <http://www.bridgewaychristianchurch.org/ntframes/Purpose.html>).

<sup>6</sup> These seven mission points have been successfully adopted and applied in the church I currently pastor. (See <http://www.bridgewaychristianchurch.org/ntframes/Purpose.html>).

<sup>7</sup> By “high view of Scripture” I mean a pastor is to regard the Bible as the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God and the primary source for evangelical faith and life. He considers the Bible to be the final court of arbitration in all doctrinal matters and codes of conduct.

<sup>8</sup> Rooted in the sufficiency of Scripture, Nouthetic counseling is form of Christian counseling developed by Jay E. Adams, and published in his 1970 book, *Competent to Counsel*.

<sup>9</sup> To be clear, while there is certainly value in some psychotic medicines (as they pertain to legitimate mental disorders), replacing the Bible with the world’s wisdom—that is, “pop psychology” or “felt-needs counseling”—is an assault on the power of Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of God’s Word.