

What is a Pastor?

Being a pastor means that, first and foremost, I am to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. I agree with that. The most important things that a pastor does are preaching and presiding at Communion and Baptisms. But that only begins to answer the question. Being a pastor means many other things.

Being a pastor is to be welcomed into people's lives. It is to be allowed the privilege of rejoicing with people in their joy, of mourning with people in their sorrow, of walking with people as we go through the changes of our lives. For me, one of the greatest joys of being a pastor is to be allowed to touch and share in other's lives and to have my own life touched in the process. That is a special thing, a holy thing, when Christians share together.

Being a pastor is having a 4-year old stop you in Safeway and inquire, "Master Park, are we going to have Vacation Bible School again this year?" It's to wonder while doing a children's sermon if you ever will get back to the point you hope to make. It's to try to keep up with the youth group in volleyball.

Being a pastor is visiting with elderly people and shut-ins and having them talk with you from out of their lifetime of experiences. It is to realize that, in every life, there is triumph and sorrow, pain and joy. It is to wonder at all that can happen in a lifetime.

Being a pastor is to listen as people talk with you out of pain and turmoil of their lives. It is to hurt at hearing what people go through and to begin to gain a deep sense of the scars and loneliness of human life. You marvel at people's abilities to continue on even in the midst of crises.

Being a pastor is to get nervous with the phone rings after 11 p.m. because, chances are, it won't be good news. It's to spend hours on the phone, arranging and rearranging schedules. You begin to wonder if the telephone is a blessing or a curse.

Being a pastor is to be in a hospital room with the father and mother of a newborn child. It's to see the radiance of the mother and relief of the father, and to be in awe with them at God's precious miracle of birth. You rejoice together in that time of joy.

Being a pastor is to again stand in a hospital room and feel your own tears as you pray with a critically ill parishioner whom you care for deeply. It's to hold someone's hand as they take their journey into the valley of the shadow. It's to feel the hurt, the emptiness, that comes with death.

Often you ache in your own spirit as you see the pain and trauma of human life. And yet, together with other Christians, you look to the Lord who promises to make all things new, and you lean on the Lord who gives hope even in darkness.

Being a pastor is working with the Confirmation class and being amazed as a student asks a question about God that you hadn't even thought of until you were in college. It's watching students wrestle with questions, and it's rejoicing to see God's hand in the lives of our young people.

Being a pastor is going on retreats and ski trips and conferences. It's getting used to not sleeping on overnights with the Senior League. It's sharing with youth at 2:00 in the morning as together you try to discern what it means to be a Christian.

Being a pastor is talking with people. Sometimes people call and won't even identify themselves, but the pain in their lives has become so great they need someone to talk to. There are the uplifting conversations, too. People visit who have survived the crises and can now celebrate life. Often, as a pastor, you know all the emotions between pain and joy in the course of one day, sometimes, in the course of only a few hours.

Being a pastor is to share God's word with people. Even with all that is wrong in our lives, there is still a Lord who calls us to Himself. The deepest thrill of being a pastor is when you see the hand of Christ in the lives of people. Christ does touch us, and the power of His Gospel is incredibly and beautifully special.

Being a pastor is feeling like you've given all that you have to give, and then in a moment of encouragement from a parishioner, realizing that you have received more than you could ever give. It's to be forgiven for your failings, supported by the love of your partners in Christ, blessed by a special Christian community. To be a pastor is to thank God for being allowed to share in His work with people who are becoming more and more special to you.

This is a long answer to a simple question. What is it like being a pastor? I'm not sure I can fully answer that, but I am grateful to God for a chance to serve as a pastor.

Yours in Christ,
Mark Braaten