

# Guest editorial: Pastor—a unique, contextual calling

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While searching for a particular volume in my library, another book caught my attention. *The Pastor: A Memoir* by Eugene Peterson is an inspiring autobiographical account of what it means to be called to pastoral ministry and to live out that vocation in a unique community. This book has inspired me to reaffirm my calling with fresh perspective.



Barry Howard

While Peterson is known to many primarily for his popular Bible translation, *The Message*, his most significant contribution to my world has been his writings about the pastorate.

Years ago, I read three of Peterson's books about pastoral ministry: *Five Smooth Stones of Pastoral Work*, *The Contemplative Pastor* and *Under the Unpredictable Plant*. In a church world that looks to the pastor to be the CEO, a chaplain-on-demand or an ecclesial entrepreneur, Peterson reminds ministers and churches a pastor is more like a spiritual director, a "soul friend" who walks alongside others, pointing out what God is doing in their life.

In a fast-paced world, where a competitive consumerist culture has invaded the church, pastors often are expected to be an idealistic combination of

captivating motivational speaker, savvy executive/administrator and extraordinary counselor. But the call to be a pastor is unique. There is no other vocation like it.

Veteran pastor Hardy Clemons reminds us the church is to be “more family than corporation.” Clemons advises churches and pastors alike of the pastor’s peculiar mission: “Our goal is to minister. It is not to show a profit, amass a larger financial corpus or grow bigger for our own security. The ultimate goals are to accept God’s grace, share the good news, invite and equip disciples, and foster liberty and justice for all.”

For Peterson, the call to be a pastor is a call to spiritual discernment and caring within a unique local congregation and community. It is not a “one size fits all” occupation that functions uniformly in cookie-cutter churches.

The “pastoral intelligence” gleaned from ministry becomes a primary tool of the Spirit, which informs and inspires how pastors lead and preach to their people.

In *Memoir*, Peterson summarizes his understanding of the biblical role of a pastor: The pastor is “not someone who ‘gets things done’ but rather the person placed in the community to pay attention and call attention to ‘what is going on right now’ between men and women, with one another and with God—this kingdom of God that is primarily local, relentlessly personal and prayerful ‘without ceasing.’”

Each Christian is responsible to God for fulfilling calling. Forty-one years ago, I confirmed my calling to be a pastor, and I am still learning and growing and understanding more of what it means to provide spiritual direction to a congregation.

Being a pastor is more than what I do. It is who I am called to be.

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