

# A Prayer for Pastors

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An intriguing question has been raised by the 2002 Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee: “Why isn’t the position of minister desired by more young people?” This question supposes two things: 1) That the number of young people who desire this “position” is inadequate. 2) That more young people would desire the ministry if something changed in our behavior, either as parents or young people.

The simple fact of the matter is that we do not know if the current number of young people who desire the ministry is adequate or not. This might seem to be the case, given the number of vacancies in Protestant Reformed Churches, growing mission fields, and expected retirements. Neither do we know why more young people do not desire the offices. Certainly, many factors might contribute to the suggested deficiency in the number of young people who desire the ministry: a general lack of spirituality in the churches, increasing worldliness among our young people, or a diminishing respect for the minister among parents which infects the children, to suggest a few.

The Lord of the harvest and the great Shepherd, however, does know these things. He knows all things—both our needs and what is necessary for the provision of them. That is why we are commanded to be often in prayer, making our requests known unto him and seeking his will in all things. With the firm conviction in our hearts that we receive what we need, even as we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, we should first bring our concern for ministers before our Lord. With this in mind, we humbly offer the following prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven, we petition thee as the Lord of the harvest and the great Shepherd, whose field and flock extends to the ends of the earth and throughout history. Lord and Shepherd, give unto thy church gardeners to labor among the crop and pastors to tend thy flock. We need them.

We need caretakers because of who we are. In thy great wisdom thou hast created thy people as tender plants, sown as tiny seed that must grow unto the day of harvest. We develop only by thy continual care through means of faithful gardeners. If not tended, we will die in this dry and thirsty land. Our hard hearts must be cultivated, the seed sown, our thirsty faith watered, and our growth nourished. The young shoots among us must be shaded from the oppressive heat. Dead growth must be cut off and choking weeds pulled out. O Lord in thy mercy, grant unto us caretakers to man the plow, disseminate the seed, water the roots, protect the buds, and wield the pruning hook—all by thy Word. Grant us such men lest we languish.

Thou hast made us as sheep dependent upon loving shepherds. We require shelter from the storm of controversy, warmth from the bitter winds of false doctrine, and sustenance for our spiritual development. We cannot find the green pastures and still waters on our own, but must be led there by one who knows the way. And when led there we do not remain, but wander off on our own, looking for richer fields, tastier drink, and prettier barns. We are easily fooled by false prophets dressed as sheep, and our little lambs skip through the meadows oblivious to the hungry eyes peering from the thickets. Our wounds need bandages and our diseases, medicine. The burdened require tender affection. O Lord give us pastors to feed thy flock, who work under

thee, the great Shepherd, to gather the lambs in their arms and hug them tight to their bosom, and to gently lead the mothers with their little ones. We need such men lest we be scattered, devoured, or starve.

Keep us from hirelings, those miserable scoundrels, who do not love us tender plants and fractious sheep, but ambitiously pursue their own glory; who do not nurture thy people, but are the occasion for uproar and schism. Save us from the calloused hands of pompous shepherds who are no part of the flock themselves, but only use us for their own gain; who sheer the sheep, and feed them noxious plants and turbid water; who run when the wolf comes; who allow the lost to starve, the cold to shiver, and the injured to fend for themselves. Lord keep us from such men.

We petition thee, our Father, because thou alone art able to provide us with true pastors. We are instructed that they must possess certain gifts to do their work. Besides the required natural abilities, they must be blameless, not self-willed, not soon angry, no winebibber, brawler, or one greedy for gain. They must love hospitality and good men, be sober, just, holy, temperate, and hold fast the faithful word—able by sound doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers. Who has ever seen such a man, except thou hast by thy grace fashioned, set aside, and sustained him for thy church? We pray unto thee, to work mightily by thy Spirit to instill such gifts into men as future ministers of the Word.

They must be developed through covenantal instruction by God-fearing parents and diligent nurture by their spiritual mother, the church. Only thou art able to provide for such training. Grant that we who are parents be faithful in the rearing of our children, and train them in the way that they must go, believing that any of our young men may be called by thee to be ministers of the gospel. May we eagerly support covenantal education and the seminary of our churches, not merely monetarily, but chiefly with prayer. Grant that thy church always have pastors to nourish its young, from which comes our future shepherds.

We petition thee, O Father, because thou alone art able to bring young men to a conscious realization of this calling to the ministry. We know that thou dost give unto every man his work, but grant that those whom thou hast chosen may know in their hearts that they have been called to be pastors. They must know, for they are entrusted with the most serious of duties—duties from which they would otherwise shrink: the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Work by thy Spirit, that men receive such a call in the depths of their soul, and respond by dedicating their lives to such a noble calling.

We know, O Lord, that thou hast always provided for our needs, both as individuals and as churches. We are concerned that we have enough pastors to do the work that seems so evident to us. Let it not be that we are withheld ministers because we have not petitioned thee our God. Let it not be because we do not feel the need. Let it not be because of our pride. We confess that we often think we are great oaks which can survive on our own. We look at our roots and think them planted deeply enough—scarcely meditating on how they got there and upon what water they drink. Our wispy branches seem like mighty boughs that no wind could ever shake. We rather like the weeds from time to time, and the dead branches seem useful. As sheep, we often bite the hand that feeds us or cut the pastor as he tends to our wounds. When lost, we run farther away. But all this is precisely why we need pastors—servants who love us exactly because we are tender plants and stubborn sheep. Give unto us pastors who love thy people, and who are called and equipped to work in thy fields. We need them, O Lord. Amen.

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