

Lord, Thy Church, Without a Pastor

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892)

Lord, Thy church, without a pastor,
Cries to Thee in her distress;
Hear us, gracious Lord and Master,
And with heavenly guidance bless.

Walking midst Thy lamps all golden,
Thou preservest still the light;
Stars in Thy right hand are holden,
Stars to cheer Thy church's night.

Find us, Lord, the man appointed
Pastor of this flock to be,
One with holy oil anointed,
Meet for us, and dear to Thee.

Send a man, O King in Zion,
Made according to Thine heart,
Meek as lamb, and bold as lion,
Wise to act a shepherd's part.

Grant us now Thy heavenly leading,
Over every heart preside,
Now, in answer to our pleading,
All our consultations guide.



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In the Nick of Time

Another Year

Kevin T. Bauder

Central Baptist Theological Seminary held its first commencement in 1957. Except for last year (2020) we have celebrated graduations every year since. As with other seminaries, last year's ceremonies were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, however, we were able to award degrees to a dozen graduates in three programs.

None of this year's graduates was under thirty years old, and their ages ranged upwards to past sixty. We used to get students right out of college, and they would push through seminary in three years. Now we tend to get students who are already in ministry, who are rearing families, and who want to take their time finishing school. Some of them have already enjoyed complete careers and hope to devote the rest of their lives to ministry. Some of them are taking advanced degrees. In most cases they have substantial experience behind them.

For example, we graduated four Doctors of Ministry this year. One is a veteran missionary church planter. One is a professor in a Bible college and seminary. Two are senior pastors, one in Colorado and one in Michigan. Of these four, two are in their sixties. All intend to continue in the same ministries that they have held for years (or, in some cases, decades).

At the opposite end of the academic spectrum are those individuals who are graduating with the Master of Arts degree. This is our least advanced and least demanding degree, but all three who received it have already been actively involved in pastoral ministry. One has pastored the same church for upwards of a decade. All are mature men.

Five Master of Divinity graduates crossed the platform this year. The oldest is at the age at which most people retire. The other four have all been pastors. Three of them will continue in their present ministries. The other had left a pastoral ministry in Michigan to move to Central Seminary, and he has already been called to a church in Alaska.

Rarely have I been more pleased with a graduating class. These are tested men, not novices. They have survived trials and choices. They have already shown that they will persevere in ministry. They have also demonstrated

their ability to balance study, family, and work. To all appearances, they should have fruitful years of serving the Lord ahead of them.

What we do not have are recent college graduates who have completed seminary and who are eager to step into the pulpits of the many smaller, pastorless churches around the country. Hardly a week goes by without some congregation asking Central Seminary's staff or faculty for help finding a pastor. Too often we must reply that we have no recent graduates to suggest, because our graduates are already active in ministries.

Here and there are many churches, most of them small, that seem to have difficulty finding a pastor. They can gather names quickly enough; indeed, many men seem quite prepared to recommend themselves to any pulpit committee that will listen. Finding someone who is qualified to hold the office of pastor-bishop-elder, however, turns out to be more of a challenge. If you are a member of a pulpit committee, you can expect to receive names of men who have disqualified themselves from ministry morally or financially—and you will have no way of knowing it until you do a thorough check of their backgrounds and references. You can expect to receive names of men who have neglected to gain adequate understanding of the Bible and doctrine. You can expect to receive names of men who interview well but who have proven their lack of ability to work with people. You can expect to receive names of men who imagine ministers to be social justice warriors, ecclesiastical entrepreneurs, or religious impresarios. You can expect to receive names of men who will see your church as a platform for advancing idiosyncrasies (whether doctrinal or practical) that will fundamentally alter the direction of its ministry. Only rarely will you receive names of men who really desire to do the work of a bishop, who have been tested, and who have improved their gifts so that they can fulfill their calling.

If it were up to me, I would wish that we were enrolling a hundred young men every year—a hundred men who had the desire and gifts to become pastors. Better still, I could wish that we were graduating a hundred men who, in addition to desire and gifts, had received the best preparation that we could give them in biblical languages and content, systematic and historical theology, and ministry practice. I would love to see a hundred men going out every year who were committed to proclaiming not only the gospel but also the whole counsel of God, men who would foster and nourish congregations in knowledge, love, and obedience toward Christ.

If it were up to me, that is what I would wish for. But it is not up to me. I cannot call men into ministry. Seminaries cannot call men into ministry. Only the Holy Spirit calls pastors, and He uses local churches as His nurseries for those whom He intends to call.

May the Lord of the harvest send forth laborers into His harvest. While He does, my co-laborers and I will continue to do the best job we can of pre-

paring those men whom the Lord does send, whether they are younger or older. For the moment, I thank the Lord for this year's dozen fine graduates.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
