



The call to ministry can come at any time in life

By SHEILA GARRETT

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What prompts people of various religious backgrounds to devote their lives to the ministry?

G. Terry Baird, interim pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, said, "It's not something you set out to do, but something you do because you can't help yourself."

"There is no obvious reason why one should choose the ministry," said Baird, a minister for 42 years. "You won't get rich. You won't work a 40-hour week. You will not be liked by everybody and nobody is going to take care of you."

In his Pentecostal sermon given at the Beulah church, Baird spoke about when he was a small child and how the works of the Holy Spirit had already inspired him. Later, he said, an influential high school teacher was determined that he should go to Harvard for further education. Instead, he chose a small Presbyterian College where Biblical scholarship led him into the ministry.

When he was 32-years-old, he recalled, he was being considered as a pastor for a large church in Findlay, Ohio.

A church committee member informed him: "Young man, I didn't vote for you and want you to know why. My soul does not have time to wait for you to grow up."

That was the only time in his life, Baird said, that he was totally speechless. He now believes that she was right in that he was probably too young, but through the help of the Holy Spirit, he not only was chosen, but remained at that church for the next 30 years.

"You see the Holy Spirit in retrospect," Pastor Baird said. "You don't see it by looking ahead, or at the time. But you need to stay open to the nudge you get."

Pastor Robert Zagore of Trinity Lutheran Church in Traverse City was a convert to Lutheranism. He spent a lot of time studying the faith, deciding whether it was the church for him. He went to a Lutheran college, he said, because he wanted to play football and attend a good school.

"As it turns out, I wasn't good enough for the football team, but I got something better," he said. He talked to many pastors and professors, made his decision and entered the seminary at the age of 25. He recalls that the average age of the students was the mid 30's.

"One man entered at the age of 57 years," Zagore commented, "and he was not the oldest man on campus."

Lutheran pastors must have a college degree, he explained. He had earned a degree in accounting, and was planning to be a lawyer. Then he made his choice

of the ministry, and studied for his master's degree in theology.

Wayne Dziekan, pastor of both St. Michael's Church in Suttons Bay and St. Gertrude's Church in Northport, says he was also "a late bloomer."

A native of Chicago, Dziekan, like Baird, was attracted to the religious life as a child.

"I wondered what a call from God would be like," he said. "It was in my mind."

As a student at the University of Chicago, he studied biology. After graduation, he opened a flower shop in a Chicago suburb.

"It's not so very different, you know," joked Dziekan. "You still deal with baptisms, weddings and funerals."

After running the shop for seven years, he said, he began exploring options for expanding the business, but his heart wasn't in it.

"I didn't feel that I was where I belonged," he said.

Dziekan entered the seminary at the age of 31, to prove to himself that it really wasn't for him. After one year, he began to wonder what the second year would be like.

"There's a drive deep inside you that you can't stifle, can't ignore and you can't change its course," he said.

Dziekan has been a priest in northern Michigan for the past five years.

Pastor Jerry Bauman, senior Pastor of the Bible Baptist Church in Traverse City, always knew, from the time he became a Christian, that he wanted to be a minister. He went to a Christian college after high school with that goal in mind.

"Many of those I've met have decided at a later age," said Bauman. "Older adults do quit their previous jobs, sometimes to do mission work."

Bauman, who has been in the

ministry for 37 years, has been to 10 foreign countries himself, including Guatemala, Mexico, Portugal and Argentina. In Zaire, he taught at Bible schools and helped to build a house for the resident pastor.

In the future, he wants to continue to do what he is doing now, "to help people and to be faithful," he said.

Rev. Dan Henke of Praise West Church in Traverse City was in junior high school when a chance meeting with a traveling evangelist caused him to become interested in the ministry. The call was not a one-time thing, he said, but something that continues. He directed his studies toward the ministry and became a minister in 1984. Although he considered teaching and music as careers, he felt there was no other choice for him. He believes that God continues to direct a person from the inside and that this is confirmed by other people.

Praise West began in October, 2000. Henke described it as a concept, a church without boundaries, with an informal atmosphere and participation by everyone.

On Sunday, the church group meets at the Elmwood Township Center, although during the week they meet in many different places.

For anyone considering a life in the ministry, the clergymen urge prayer and careful consideration. Rev. Henke suggested that they read the Bible to help and guide them.

"I advise them to ask God to show them the way he wants them to go," said Henke.

Pastor Zagore advised, "Keep praying, especially if you're having a tough time making up your mind. You can't go into this life half-heartedly."

Fr. Dziekan said that there are many hardships.

"But what life isn't difficult?" he asked. "It has its benefits, a lot of them, and a lot of trials. A big secret to the ministry and to life itself, is poverty, because it gives you a sense of solidarity with the poor."

"Don't be afraid of the unknown," said Bauman. "It's a wonderful calling and God will help you if he calls you."

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.

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