

St. Paul's...

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Words from Pastor

When to Call Your Pastor

Most people are familiar with the jokes about a pastor's schedule—ie. that he only has to work one day a week and, therefore, he has it pretty easy Monday-Saturday. In reality, it has been my experience, most people do not believe the joke. It seems most people believe the opposite to be more true: that the pastor is so busy that he cannot be bothered. I know this because many people with whom I interact, either in person or on the phone, frequently makes such comments as: "Oh, Pastor, I know you're so busy..." or "I hate to bother you..." or "You don't have to come because I know you are busy..."

Here's the truth about my schedule (and most pastors I know): *It is flexible!* A pastor's schedule must be responsive to the needs of the people he is called to serve. Yes, it is true my schedule can, and does, easily get filled with visits, meetings, phone calls/e-mails, on top of the time that must be devoted to prayer, study, worship, Bible Study, Confirmation and sermon planning. I also have personal responsibilities in care of the beautiful (and large!) parsonage I am blessed with here, as well as to my family and friends. Nevertheless, I am your pastor 24 hours a day, 7 days week.

At my installation I was asked if I intended to "faithfully instruct both young and old, forgive the sins of those who repent, minister faithfully to the sick and dying, be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the Confessions, be in constant prayer for those under my pastoral care, admonish and encourage you towards holy living, and all while demonstrating to the Church *a constant and ready ministry* centered in the Gospel." I vowed that I would, with the help of God, and I wholeheartedly mean it! So never hesitate to call me, especially when you need a pastor. Whatever your need—whether you think it is small or great—as a pastor I promised to be there, as God's representative, *for you!*

Here's a helpful reminder for you concerning specific situations when you should call your pastor:

- At the time of hospitalization. The days are long gone when the hospitals will call the church to let us know you're in the hospital. If you want the pastor to visit, don't assume he knows you're there, even if you told some of your friends from church. *Call him!* Some people are anxious about the pastor visiting when they're not looking their best. Don't be concerned! Your pastor wants to bring the comfort of God's Word to you when you need it most. One old German word for pastor is "seelsorger", which translated means "curer of souls." The medicine of God's Word and Sacrament is needed when a person is sick just as much as the medicine and therapy that comes from physicians and nurses.
- At the time of death of a loved one. It is preferable, if at all possible, that you call the pastor before death occurs. Your pastor has words of comfort for the dying person as well as for family

members confronted by the reality of death. The dying person may also desire to give confession that they may be at peace with the things of their life. This is not just a Roman Catholic practice. It is *certainly not necessary nor demanded*, as it is with Catholics. Yet if desired it is available and you would see what a great blessing, comfort and peace it provides as one departs this life at peace in their Savior who has forgiven all their sins, and speaks this Absolution through the pastor. Your pastor also can be a resource to help you navigate the steps that need to be followed surrounding a death. He has probably been around more death than you can possibly imagine and thus can be a calm and helpful resource at this time.

- When your conscience is troubled by sin and you desire the assurance of God's forgiveness and grace. We all know that even the most faithful church members sin in specific ways. Our sin troubles us, and like an untreated illness can get out of control quickly to a serious illness that is damaging to ourselves and others, untreated sin is even more damaging. It has present and eternal consequences! However, God does not leave you alone to struggle with temptation and guilt. The devil loves to use such opportunities to lead even Christians to despair. God invites you to confess your sin and receive forgiveness for Christ's sake. You can go to your pastor for "Individual Confession & Absolution" knowing for certain that he will not reveal what is confessed, neither will he judge you. He will speak God's Word to you so that you will leave knowing *"as far as the east is from the west so have your transgressions been removed"*.

Once again, this is definitely not just a Roman Catholic Practice. Martin Luther himself writes in a section of the Large Catechism encouraging the practice, "When I urge a man to go to Confession, I am simply asking him to live as a Christian." It is not necessary nor demanded of you, yet it is urged and encouraged because you will find no greater comfort in this life than to hear God's Word of Absolution spoken *to you* through your pastor for specific sins that trouble your conscience. Your own pastor makes regular practice of this himself by going to his Father Confessor. So he knows exactly how extremely beneficial for the Christian life it is to give comfort and strength for putting to death the sinner, that he may arise to live as a holy child of God!

- During times of medical testing or when a difficult diagnosis is received. It can be difficult to face the uncertainty of waiting for test results or coping with an unpleasant diagnosis. Your pastor wants to pray with you and for you, to help you cast your cares upon the Lord and trust in His faithfulness to endure.

- When you know you will be absent from worship for an extended period of time. Sometimes people can't get to church because of illness, frailty, weather, work conflicts or other hectic life-related issues. Whatever the reason, don't be afraid to call your pastor. He can and will come right to your home, at a time that works for you, and bring you God's Word and Sacrament—that is God's gifts to you for your life of faith—with a brief service of Scripture and the Sacrament.

- When you are experiencing marital, family, work or any relationship difficulties. If your marriage is struggling, or if you are struggling as a parent, or if difficult family circumstances emerge, or at work, etc. your pastor is trained to apply God's Word to the different situations that come up as sinful people live and interact with one another. Such difficulties could include unemployment, imprisonment, addiction, abuse, mental health, and many more. A pastor is a "safe" person to speak to. His wisdom and counsel is from the Word of God, which is sufficient for all trials and struggles we face in this life. This does not omit the place of other help you may seek, but as with physical struggles, the medicine of God's Word is necessary for your spiritual health at all times. Your "seelsorger" is ready with the right medicine for the "cure of your soul!" Remember also, your pastor prays daily for the sheep and you can enlist his personal prayers!

- At pregnancy and the birth of a child. Your pastor will not ask you if you are pregnant! (Men know better than to *ever* assume this!) Please let your pastor know so he can pray for you and your unborn child. He will also desire to meet with you to discuss Baptism. Likewise, when the child

is born, inform the pastor so that he can visit and bless the child. If, God forbid, there are complications at the birth of a child, call your pastor immediately. He can come and perform an emergency baptism so you may have the comfort and assurance of your child's salvation with the promise in Baptism should the worst happen.

- If you are thinking about becoming engaged/become engaged to be married. Your pastor should be one of the first people that you seek guidance from as you make such an important life decision. God created marriage, and He desires to bless your marriage through instruction and preparation in His Word and in the ceremony before His Altar. Certainly, the pastor should be consulted before you select a wedding date, so as to ensure no schedule conflicts! A Christian marriage needs to be rooted and grounded in God's Word and Christ's love. Your pastor will meet with an engaged couple for pre-marriage instruction.
- When you have spiritual struggles or questions. Questions often come up about the faith that you may not know how to answer. Don't be afraid to talk with your pastor about them. Most pastors love to discuss God's Word and help people grow in their understanding of it. This is one of the primary reasons God gives pastors to the Church and why they spend a lot of money and a lot of years going to school. You are called, as all Christians are, to be a theologian (that is to speak about God and His Word). Yet you don't have to be a professional. Your pastor is.
- You have a friend or relative who wants to know more about faith in Christ or is struggling and you want to help, but are not sure what to say or how to help. One way of spreading the Gospel is to invite people to come and see. Don't be afraid to invite your friends to speak to your pastor, and offer to come with them so they may feel comfortable. Especially do this if they have questions that you don't know how to answer!
- If you feel like your pastor has failed you, offended you or you are in conflict with him... make the first words on the matter *to him*. Your pastor loves you. He never intentionally seeks to sin against you and desires to always be at peace with you. He also never wants to see even one of Christ's precious sheep entrusted to his care as pastor leave the congregation, especially if they are angry with him. Make no mistake, the devil is hard at work in congregations to tear them apart, and he often works hardest in relationship between parishioners and their pastors. As Christians, Scripture commands us to talk in love *with the person* we have conflict with *first*. Always put the best construction on situations by assuming the best and never slander them by talking to others before first seeking reconciliation with them. Trust that your pastor wants to be at peace with you, and will lovingly receive your call in these situations, even if difficult, that Christ and His Gospel love may triumph.

As always, life for everyone gets busy—you and your pastor alike. There will be times when I am simply not able to immediately be there physically. But always know you can call me any time. You are never a bother to me, and I love to be there for you as your pastor. If it is an emergency do not hesitate to call me, *day or night*. Never assume I know, always call. I am available and would love to talk with you. I am also available to meet you at home, for lunch or a cup of coffee, or in my study at the church. You can call me on my cell, text me, call the office, or send me an email.

Serving you in Jesus' Name,
Pastor Sean
Office: 618-965-3831
Email: revseansmith@icloud.com
Facebook: /revseansmith
Twitter: @stlseansmith