

# **The Last Long Pastorate, by F. Dean Lueking & Ministry Loves Company, by John Galloway Jr.**

reviewed by [David J. Wood](#) in the [September 20, 2003](#) issue

Pastors need to reflect on their lives--on what they do, why they do it, and how such doing shapes a way of life. F. Dean Lueking and John Galloway Jr. both write out of the experience of a lifetime of ministry.

Lueking offers the story of a ministry--from ordination to retirement--within a single congregation: Grace Lutheran Church in the Chicago suburb of River Forest, where he served for 44 years, 35 as senior pastor. I was struck by the way his call to ministry was mediated by a thick, cohesive Lutheran culture that provided a seamless, tutored movement from home, to sanctuary, to college, to seminary, to graduate school, to congregation. In a day when the church's capacity to call forth a new generation of pastoral leaders is very much in question, one cannot but be impressed by this account.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Lueking's narrative is that it speaks, explicitly and implicitly, of the long, slow process of becoming a pastor. Ordination authorizes what it takes a lifetime to internalize. In one place he describes the central practice of achieving pastoral identity (which is finally a gift) as embracing the dailiness of congregational life: "Everydayishness was not boredom or hand-over-hand sameness; it was the receiving of the overwhelming goodness of people and their love as a sustenance for my daily work." It is the dailiness of ministry that provides the context for constancy--an exemplification of what Nietzsche termed a "long obedience in the same direction."

At the same time, Lueking's story reminds us of the way events entirely beyond our control will intervene and demand response--and how those responses (and not the events themselves) shape our lives in permanent ways. The capacity to interpret those events and to discern an adequate response is thoroughly dependent upon

one's faithfulness to the dailiness of the pastoral life.

The defining epoch of Lueking's ministry was the split in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod that occurred in the 1970s. In the early days of this schism, Grace Lutheran Church voted to withdraw from the Missouri Synod, and a battle for ownership of Grace Church's property ensued. Lueking provides an extended narrative of his role in this process at the national and local levels. It is a tale of intrigue that winds all the way from fellowship hall to the Supreme Court. For those curious about this event within the Lutheran community, this account will be well worth the read. For non-Lutherans, it will feel overdrawn. The impact of civil rights, Vietnam, Vatican II, and the myriad of social, cultural and political upheavals of the 1960s and '70s receives considerably less attention. The accounts we do get of how Lueking lived through these times are instructive and leave the reader wishing for more.

I had hoped for more critical reflection on the particular demands of a long pastorate. How does one keep familiarity from fostering either contempt or complacency? One detects some of this below the surface and between the lines, but a more explicit reflection would have been welcomed. More description of how Lueking actually embodied the dailiness of ministry would have added force to his claim that attentiveness to the order of the day is fundamental to fullness in ministry.

John Galloway Jr.'s genre is not autobiography but advice. As the word "survival" suggests, Galloway does not have a romantic or sentimental view of the pastoral life. He offers his wisdom on beginning a new ministry, developing a vision, fostering church growth, doing the work of administration, dealing with conflict, cultivating stewardship and promoting mission.

He states up front that "the style of the book will be anecdotal," and the book certainly lives up to this claim. His self-conscious "easygoing, lighthearted style" is intended to help pastors loosen up a bit and recover some good humor amidst the often disheartening and demoralizing experience of leading congregations. This style proved to be a stumbling block for this reader: it sometimes comes off as overly casual, even flippant. A few examples: "If I had but one observation it would be that we [pastors] have become a bunch of chickens." "Any pastor will be a candidate for the funny farm who actually thinks the church can come to decisions and make major changes quickly." "We need to be let in on the deep dark secret. We

clergy are highly skilled liars when we talk to each other." For some reason, I was not encouraged by such remarks.

Galloway effectively acquaints us with the parochial, self-centered, change-resistant, trivializing, impious tendencies of mainline congregations. In the end, he is much more effective in bringing to light these downsides of congregational life than in convincing us that there is anything of real significance a pastor can do about them. Rather than reaching the depth of congregational life, I felt myself becoming enclosed within its superficiality. If I were reading this book as a young pastor, fresh out of seminary, I would begin to wonder if I could survive the congregational realities Galloway describes or the banal company of pastors I was about to become part of.

His working analogy for congregational life is the family reunion, and the role of pastor is cast as the facilitator "of an extended family reunion in a family to which we do not belong." This leads to an extended argument in the first few chapters that the wisest thing a pastor can do in a new pastorate is nothing--for the first year. He moves on to describe the need to lead folks beyond their parochial ways, but the analogy of the family reunion and the pastor as facilitator is in play throughout the narrative and serves as a rationale for why pastors should go easy on dealing with all the family baggage that clutters congregational life. There is much in this account that encourages pastors to work around the edges, to rarely turn up the heat, to keep the peace, to let people vent, to not take things personally, and to become thick-skinned and slow-moving. This approach makes the book indeed seem like a guide to surviving ministry rather than thriving in it.

One of Galloway's more interesting arguments is that pastors should know what their congregants contribute monetarily. And he makes a strong case for seeing administrative work--which pastors so often find distracting and debilitating--as part of the practice of hospitality.

Galloway dedicates the book to his wife, who is suffering from Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS). When I read this I immediately thought, "How does one survive, as a pastor, the experience of a spouse suffering in the grip of such a horrid disease?" Unfortunately, there is no more mention of this dimension of his life in the book. On such a subject, and many others, I believe we need more accounts by pastors--accounts of how they lived out their "long obedience in the same direction." Such stories abound in practical wisdom, but they come to us as testimony.