

So, the ministry expert in Jesus Christ is convinced partners in ministry are a good idea. That came to life all the more for me while I was serving a year of internship during seminary. This was going to be the time to see if this whole pastor thing was a good idea, after all, to test if anything I had learned in seminary was worth applying out in the real world, not to mention working with a team of people in making the church happen for the sake of members and complete strangers, alike. Yes, I would be working with a supervising pastor, but also a church administrator, a director of music, a youth coordinator, church council, ministry teams, and on and on the roster of ministry partners went.

And as much as the seventy mentioned in the Gospel had no idea where the Lord might be sending them: to towns they had never been, away from their families, doing work they were not quite so sure they were fully qualified to do; that is how *I* felt when I was sent off to Dallas, Texas. For someone who grew up in a small town of several thousand, moving to a gargantuan monstrosity known as the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex encompassing several million people, there was a bit of an interesting transition, to say the least: leaving behind family, leaving behind home

towns, leaving behind the basic comfort of what was known for so long for me. All the more reason why I desperately needed some partners for what lied ahead.

I didn't exactly know what to expect in the partnership between myself, being the intern, and the supervising pastor. I wasn't going to be shocked if he was the one sitting in his office, giving me orders of what to do down the hall. I might get to preach a sermon or two down the line, if he liked me enough by then. Maybe he would check in to see how I was doing every once in a while, when he basically had to, in order to report back to the seminary of my progress or lack thereof. I wasn't going to hope for a collegial relationship or anything: he was, obviously, much higher up on the ministry ladder than me. Thankfully, not all partnerships in ministry, or in life, for that matter, operate that way.

Pastor Bill was different: the kind of partner in ministry, the kind of brother in Christ that, hopefully, everyone gets to experience along this journey where we, quite simply, cannot traverse alone. Pastor Bill was in the ordained ministry service for decades by the time I came around to put a wrench into his day-to-day work life, but he never lauded that over me. I had

lunch with him on a weekly basis, not out of obligation on his part, but because he cared about the one sitting on the other side of the table. He had a way of doing that with everyone, though; as if everyone was more than worthy of his time and attention. He had a way of bringing a glimpse of the very compassion the ministry expert in Jesus Christ Himself brought to life: an expert who didn't like to *lord* his holy expertise over anyone who came into his path.

Now, one of the things that I had to quickly get used to in the church realm was people coming off the streets asking for help: sometimes for cash, sometimes for food, sometimes asking for a ride or assistance with a utility bill. Christ Lutheran Church in Dallas, already, had a system in place: a certain amount of money that could be used, food baskets already prepared, gift cards that could be handed out, not to mention taking names and numbers and pictures of ID so as to only help the individual or family once a year. But there was this one time I was speaking with a gentleman out in the lobby area, and as Pastor Bill walked by, as he was leaving for the day, the gentleman asked if *he* was the pastor, and if he could talk to him, instead. Pastor Bill, then said, while pointing at me, "He's a pastor, too." And before

Pastor Bill left, he asked if I was okay to continue speaking with him, and checked with me again, just to make sure. There *are* such partners in ministry out there, sisters and brothers in Christ, and most don't even wear a collar to bring about such encouragement and compassion to make us feel as if we have something to offer too.

Because, I should, also, mention that, a few months later, Pastor Bill took a sabbatical for what felt like forever, but was only a couple months or so. Shortly after he left, of course, there was a death in the congregation and the family wanted to serve a meal in the fellowship hall after the service. I didn't want to be that guy asking for help right off the bat, as if I couldn't handle anything on my own. So, instead of calling other partners in ministry on those ministry teams of the church, *I* setup all the tables and chairs by myself. Of course, people were impressed by my initiative, but time and time again, they reassured me *that* is what they were there for: whatever I needed, no matter the day or time...make the call. Evidently, it is okay to ask for help. It's okay that we cannot handle everything on our own. God does not expect that of any of us.

The ministry expert in Jesus Christ says partners in ministry are not only helpful, but essential. In case we didn't put it together already: we are not asked to save the world, not even our own lives. We are not even asked to make God's love known by ourselves. Even from our baptism we are ushered into waters that are already overflowing with other disciples, other sisters and brothers in Christ in all walks of life, other imperfect, struggling to keep their head above water at times; but also wonderful, cherished by God, as if they are more than worthy to follow the ministry expert Himself into wherever the waters may take us.

Lest we forget, the ministry expert made a promise to not stay in some heavenly office shouting down impossible orders and make sure we follow all of them, instilling guilt and shame of a top-down relationship of intimidating authority. No, God made the decision to come down, and *stay* down right in the thick of it along with us, no matter the day, no matter the time, no matter how unqualified we may feel along the way. The ministry expert has already decided to never, ever leave us on this journey alone. And for that Greatest News of all, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen.