

Building the Church: the Pastoral Intern

The idea of internships often brings up negative connotations—images of employees passing off their work load upon an unsuspecting intern so they can relax and take it easy. Perhaps it conjures up ideas of making the intern perform menial tasks, such as retrieving dry cleaning and washing cars. While there are certainly many who abuse internships, it is important that we understand why Geneva will have a pastoral intern this summer. Far from promoting sloth, a pastoral internship plays an important part in building the Church. Let us explore the importance of a pastoral internship by examining, the nature of the church, the importance of training pastors, and the need for church to work towards building the Church.

Concerning the nature of the church, we must constantly keep before us the teaching of Scripture, namely that the Church is the great eschatological temple of God that will fill the earth on the last day (Rev 21.2-3). Paul, for example, reminds the Corinthians that they are the temple of God (1 Cor 6.19). Peter reminds us that we are “like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2.5). As God has always built dwelling places for himself in temples, such as the garden of Eden, the desert tabernacle, and the Solomonic temple, so too God is now building a dwelling place for himself, and that dwelling place is the Church, the body of Christ. By what means does God build his temple, the Church?

The primary means that God builds his temple, the Church, is through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Just as God filled Bezalel of the tribe of Judah with the Spirit of God and gave him and other artisans the skill, intelligence, knowledge, and craftsmanship with which to build the tabernacle (Exo 35.30-31), so too God fills his people with his Holy Spirit, who gives them spiritual gifts to use for the edification of the eschatological temple, the Church (1 Cor 12.28-31). Now while we can all participate in the construction of the temple in some manner, God has especially called ministers to the task of building the Church. It is through the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures and the administration of the sacraments, the specific responsibilities of ministers, that God builds the eschatological temple, the Church. If it is through the administration of word and sacrament, then, that God builds the Church, then this highlights the need and importance of training men for the ministry.

It is important that men who are preparing for the ministry, therefore, participate in internships of varying lengths, the more common are summer and year-long, to develop and hone their gifts for ministry. An intern, therefore, must preach and teach the word under the careful supervision of the elders of the church so that he can improve his skills. The intern must also see how the pastor counsels members of the congregation, arranges his schedule, and carries out the tasks of ministry. An internship is a valuable testing and proving ground so that when he finally is ordained to the ministry of the gospel, he is better prepared and equipped for his calling. What is his calling? It is to see to the construction of the temple, the Church.

While there are many churches that do not have buildings, they have the opportunity to participate in the construction of the true building, the Church, by hiring an intern. In so doing they assist in the equipping of a man for the work of ministry. So, perhaps in twenty years a congregation may never have a church building but they may have hired ten interns who later go on to start ten new churches.

For Geneva, this summer we have a unique opportunity with our first summer intern, Francis Van Delden. We have hired him and he will teach adult Sunday School, preach in the evening worship service, lead worship, accompany the pastor on pastoral visits, attend session meetings, and sit in on counseling sessions. Throughout the internship Mr. Van Delden will be under the careful supervision of the session. In all of this please be in prayer that through this experience Mr. Van Delden will gain valuable experience and training that, upon his ordination to the gospel ministry, will equip him to assist our Lord in the construction of the great eschatological temple.