

Augustana Heritage Association + Valedictory Celebration

Lansdale, Pennsylvania

June 24-26, 2016

+ Interest Group #4 +

Inspired, Called, Sent: A Century of Pastors from Jamestown, NY

What was it in our experience of the church that inspired so many, ultimately leading us to be responsive to a call? From whence in each instance did the call come? Also the presence in the greater Jamestown area not only of vibrant Augustana congregations but of a social service ministry – today known simply as *Lutheran* – that over the decades has grown to be one of the region’s largest multi-faceted agencies of its kind.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~
 ~ ~ ~ ~

1. Last January Faith and I were visited by Pastor Glenn and Terri Foster and their son, Daniel. Terri Foster, nee Mellor, was the intern at St. Paul Church, Arlington, MA, 1991-92, while at the same time Glenn was the intern at Holy Trinity Church in nearby N. Easton, MA. They had met at LTSP.
2. Glenn and I first met when he began attending St. Paul Church after beginning studies at MIT. His plans were to get a Ph.D. in chemistry. Those plans, however, were interrupted when he began to consider enrolling in seminary. And, on a particular Sunday, something he heard in that day’s sermon encouraged him to heed the strong inclination to depart Cambridge in favor of going to Philadelphia.
3. During our visit five months ago, Glenn asked whether I remembered what I said to him when he first spoke to me of what he felt prompted to do – ultimately become a pastor. I did not remember. “You said, ‘If you can possibly do anything else, do it’.” His reminder was sufficient; I did recall. I also remembered the comment as not having been original with me. I had heard it from a colleague who, apparently, thought it necessary to stress the peculiar, often time-consuming and absent-from-family demands that come with being an ordained person, a pastor in a congregation. That reality reminds me of a question, only recently shared by our son, once asked of students at Colby College by Prof. of Philosophy Yeager Hudson. Asked Hudson, “How much of your life are you willing to sell?”

4. In contrast to my comment, one of Glenn's professors at MIT (himself a deacon in his church), while hearing of his plans and not discouraging him, said that, if all did not work out as Glenn might hope, there would remain a place for him at MIT, indeed, a place in the professor's lab. And exactly what does this story have to do with the announced theme of this interest group?

5. The story I've shared raises the question of being called to pastoral service, *of what it is that prompts the call*. When it came my turn in early 1965 to appear before and be interviewed by the Examining Committee in Rock Island, and after naming the primary influences in my life – from parents to Bible Camp to pastors – that had led me to that place and juncture, one venerable committee member asked, “Do you suppose the Holy Spirit had anything to do with it?”

6. Yes, the Holy Spirit had everything to do with it. Yet, experiences differ. I don't recall much touching upon that in my paper as published in the Spring 2011 edition of the AHA Newsletter. And while Trinity Church, Brooklyn, NY – historically a Norwegian/Haugian congregation – itself raised up 40 men who were ordained into the ministry in its first 70 years (that statistic, courtesy of retired Methodist Pastor Roy Jacobsen, member of St. Andrew Church, Charlestown, RI, and further consultation with former New England Synod Bishop Robert Isaksen), still, the 62 women and men raised up in the Jamestown area congregations over a 100-125 year period is significant. The contributing congregations totaled eight in number: four in Jamestown itself, four in much smaller and nearby communities. As the late Pr. Richard E. Koenig asked in an early 2001 *New England Lutheran* article following the installation of Pr. Ronald Bagnall as pastor of Zion Church, Worcester, MA – Bagnall having been the third son of a Jamestown congregation to serve that congregation as pastor: “Is there any place today, equivalent in size to the Jamestown area, that gives the church as many pastors as has Jamestown, NY?”

7. My own experience was that, as a very young child, I would stand at the newel post of my maternal grandparents' house on a Sunday afternoon, preaching to my mother and grandmother. (Not that they paid strict attention.) Was that the same as, say, playing fireman (which my grandfather was and thus worked every other Sunday)? Perhaps, but I think it was more; because by the time I was nine years of age I'd decided to become a pastor, never in the ensuing years wavering in that intention. And that is why I've long identified with the *inner* call. Yes, I feel a kinship with young Samuel of the biblical story. Something more than a child's play was going on at that Willow Ave. newel post on a Sunday afternoon seven

decades ago, albeit the preaching was definitely lacking in memorable content.*

8. By contrast, I clearly recall the late Pr. Henry Horn (University Lutheran Church, Cambridge, MA) speaking strongly of the *Church's* call to ministry. (Perhaps he had an issue with a certain Augustana piety?) Indeed, in the book titled *Hornucopia: Selected Writings of Henry E. Horn* (University Lutheran Association of Greater Boston, 2008) and at age 86 he wrote of “having felt the call to the ordained ministry to finish the work of my father who was cut down by premature illness at 49...” (pg. 87) A call “to finish the work of my father,” he wrote. Might that not have been a personal way to speak of the Church's call?

9. Understand: I do not mean to suggest that an *inner* call and the *Church's* call are mutually exclusive; but rather that, in an individual's experience, one can be more prominent, even more decisive, than the other.

10. In any case, let us share from our own experience, our own thoughts and feelings. And above all, let us remember and rejoice that each one of us, ordained or not, **is called in Baptism** to a life of service, to a journey of faithfulness. In fact, I heard Henry Horn emphatically express himself similarly some 30 years ago at the Espousal Retreat House and Conference Center in Waltham, MA, during an annual New England Synod Pastors' Convocation.



*When downsizing last year in preparation for our move from Rhode Island to Florida, I came across what follows on the next page – an item my mother had saved, the face of an Easter season greeting card. It was accompanied by a typewritten note from Mom that reads: “This is the cross that adorned Dan's first pulpit, the newel post of the stairway in Grandma and Grandpa Haskell's home. This was even before Dan knew how to read. He always loved to play minister.”