

Ministry as participation in the continuous ministry of the living Christ: In conversation with Andrew Purves – to be in awe of your calling

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This article reflected on the ministry of the pastor as participation in the continuous ministry of the resurrected Christ, that aids the minister to find comfort in the realisation that ministry is not primarily his or her action, but merely participation, through the mystical union with the living Christ, grounded in his or her baptism, in which he or she applies all his or her theological education, gifts and skills in service of this participatory ministry.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article outlined the priestly ministry of Christ, the framework and hermeneutic perspective of awe and the compassion of Christ in which the minister participates in union with the living Christ. The outcome can be used for further research for pastoral ministry or the application in current pastoral ministry.

Keywords: mystical union with Christ; priestly ministry; compassion; participatio Christi; pastoral ministry.

Introduction

Ministry can be seen as the invitation or calling of a beloved human being¹ by the living Christ to participate in his continuous ministry as part of the *missio Dei* of the triune God.² This article³ is a conversation with and confirmation of what Andrew Purves wrote, against a Reformed background. Therefore, Purves' guidelines for ministry in mystical union with Christ in *participatio Christi* are often cited and used as a frame of reference. In conversation with Purves and other theologians (e.g. Gert Breed, Daniël Louw, Tod Billings, Eugene Peterson, Amanda du Plessis, etc.), emphasis is placed on the priestly or diaconal ministry of Jesus Christ, in which the pastor participates in union with him, and on the hermeneutical perspective of this unique ministry, the mystical union of the pastor and those ministered by him or her with Jesus' life and ministry, which places Christ at the centre throughout, the ministry of Christ in the present tense, and the compassion and awe with which the pastor participates in this priestly ministry of Christ.

When the pastor consciously lives in mystical union with Christ⁴ through his or her baptism and confirmation in the Word and the Lord's Supper, he or she sees his or her identity as a beloved child of God in Christ and he in him or her. The pastor's focus and attention, from his or her spirituality as *participatio in Spiritu*, is consistently on what the risen Jesus is doing, realising and experiencing that he or she is invited by Christ to join him and participate in his ongoing ministry in the present tense. The question our ministry must answer all the time is, 'Where is Christ present?' (Purves 2004:168). To often recall your baptism (as part of your spirituality) deepens the pastor's identity in Christ as God's beloved child, so that you put all your gifts, academic training,

1. Roger Owens (ed. Van Driel 2020:148) writes in his essay on the work of Thomas R. Kelly: 'Most fundamentally, Kelly sees the divine agency as working *through* the human agency; this human agency is a participation in the agency of Christ'. The living Christ therefore remains the Minister, continuing his ministry in union with the pastor, who participates in the life and ministry of Christ.

2. Van Helden (2016:222) mentions the term, used by Van Ruler, '*theonome reciprocity*' to describe this relationship between God and the human being. 'Van Ruler describes this relationship between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit as a "secret": Divine action (*theonome*) which makes human action possible to react according to the Divine will (Rm 8:16) (reciprocity). In this relationship of *theonome* reciprocity the Spirit dwells in believers and man stays exactly who they are, but the Divine action takes place within these persons' actions'.

3. The article is a continuation of the conversation sparked by the author's PhD thesis (ch. 4) in 2024.

4. The concept of 'mystical union with Christ' (*unio mystica cum Christo*) is used throughout this article following John Calvin's use of it: 'Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts – in short, that mystical union – are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed ... he deigns to make us one with him' (Calvin 1977:737)

your relationship with God and your being at the service of the participating ministry with Christ. Purves (2004:110) rightly says that the basis for the ministry is the minister's baptism, whereby he or she is engraved in Christ, the sign and seal of our mystical union with Christ. This is confirmed and reaffirmed again and again by the Lord's Supper, whereby the mystical union with Christ is nourished by his body and blood as our spiritual food and drink⁵ (Purves 2004:116).

The minister in mystical union with Christ's priestly ministry as a *diakonos*

The emphasis of this article is on the priestly task of the pastor, a derived task, from the ongoing priestly ministry of Christ, in the present tense, and our mystical union with Him (Purves 2004:119). The way in which we live our participation in Christ's priesthood to which we are ordained first through our baptism, and celebrate our life of service and honour to God, especially in the Lord's Supper – means that, through our obedience to God, our servant-ministry of love and service, Christ is diaconally present in the world, and he offers this service to the Father in the name of his own priesthood⁶ (Purves 2004:128). It fills the minister with awe that God takes his beloved son and daughter in his beloved Son with him and uses them in this way. Prof. Breed (2014:1) enriches this reality with his exegetical research on the word group '*diakon*' in John 12:16. The minister's and congregation's servant ministry takes place in and through Christ's Servant calling. Through our mystical union with Christ through baptism, the pastor is drawn into the love relationship of the Trinity (*perichoresis*). Our joy is to share in his ministry, even if it means sharing in his suffering. As a fellow journeying mystagogue,⁷ or *diakonos*, it also means lingering in God's baptised children's suffering, while we, together with the sufferer, find, experience and learn to love the suffering Servant.

In John 12:27–28, Jesus says that his 'soul is troubled' in anticipation of his suffering and his acceptance of his suffering and death, because the purpose of his coming to earth would be fulfilled by it. Therefore, his decision is that he will rather glorify his Father by completing the commission, through his self-sacrifice. Ministering in

5. Calvin speaks of our mystical union with Christ as the particular fruit of the Lord's Supper (Calvin 1997:1361), because why would the Lord put the symbol of his body in your hand, except to assure you of a true participation in it, Calvin's question is justified.

6. Louw (1999:124) speaks of the new identity that the pastor acquires, namely interpreter, witness, servant, priest, which makes him or her not only dependent on communication skills and conversational techniques and is free from obsession with success and personal empathy. The compassion of Christ and God's sympathy, as interpreted in the crucified Christ, determines the pastoral attitude and priestly character. It is only in this way that the pastor can act in the name and in the service of Christ. This action is consistently the pastor's participation in the ongoing priestly ministry of the living Christ. As a fellow journeying mystagogue, he or she communicates Christ's compassion to man.

7. The word mystagogue is made up of two words (mystic and *agein*) which means that one is guided or led into the hidden. The mystagogue is therefore a spiritual companion who walks as a journeying companion with believers, with the expectation that they will be open to the hidden workings of God (De Villiers 2010).

Christ means coming to the same decision, completing the commission, giving yourself, and fulfilling the task given by the Father, even if it means your death.⁸ The condition is that our surrender points to Jesus, not to 'our sacrifice'. In everything, including the pain, the pastor as a *diakonos* is focused on God's glorification (Breed 2014:3).

This does not mean that one should try to repeat or incarnate Jesus' unique reconciling work (Billings 2011:132),⁹ but rather that in one's union with him, one should be willing to give one's life as a sacrifice in the service of God and his calling so that there will be much fruit to the glory of God. To be a *diakonos* means to be a disciple, serving as Jesus served and continues to serve (Breed 2014:3). In this ministry, we participate in the ongoing, present ministry of Jesus, the true *Diakonos*, the *Ebed Yahweh*.

Diakonia flows from the conviction that I am a *diakonos*, sent by Jesus to serve him with him in love (Breed 2014:7). In this certainty, the pastor participates in Jesus' priestly ministry and points to the living Christ.

A word of caution

Still, Dillen (2017) believes that the pastor should approach the idea of self-sacrifice with caution. In some cases, sacrifice is valuable, but there are dangers associated with the sacrificial discourse, for example, that self-sacrifice can be a disguise for power. One often sees that through sacrifice or the sacrificial acts themselves, one strives for recognition, self-validation and implicitly puts the self at the centre (Dillen 2017:1). The shepherd and the good Samaritan metaphors are often used to define the pastor. The shepherd metaphor can obscure the weaknesses and mistakes of the minister. By focusing on the self-sacrifice and courage of the shepherd, one can get the impression that it is all about caring for the other. Dillen (2017:2) asks: If one constantly loses oneself, what is left to give?¹⁰

The Good Samaritan gives a lot of himself, but at the same time, the care is shared with other 'professionals'. The Good Samaritan is also not an ideal metaphor because it does not stimulate our reflection on the other's giving. Some pastors have a lot of difficulty receiving from others because they have learned to care for others, or have always taken on the caring role, and often receive self-validation through caring (Dillen 2017:3).

8. It reminds us of what Bonhoeffer (2003:87) wrote: 'Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death. Whether we, like the first disciples, must leave house and vocation to follow him, or whether, with Luther, we leave the monastery for a secular vocation, in both cases the same death awaits us, namely, death in Jesus Christ, the death of our old self caused by the call of Jesus.'

9. One implication of adopting an approach favouring the notion of union with Christ the servant over that of incarnational ministry is that union with Christ puts more emphasis on the specific, concrete ministry and life of Jesus Christ (Billings 2011:145).

10. Purves (2004:29) refers precisely to this pastoral metaphor when he points out that an inadequate metaphor leads to a 'reductionist pastoral practice'. According to this metaphor, Jesus is seen as the Good Shepherd, while the minister is then a sub-shepherd. According to him, this metaphor has fallen into disuse (Purves 2004:29). 'It is forgotten perhaps that shepherds farm sheep in order to kill and eat them!' (Purves 2004:31).

In the end, it is only Jesus who is truly the Good Shepherd, and the minister must be careful not to boast that he or she is 'incarnating the image of the Shepherd – this must always be related to Jesus' perfect and enabling love that cannot be expected of people without God's help. It can be an antidote to the messiah complex (cf. Eswine 2015:73–74; Nouwen 1989:15; Peterson 1992:178), who wants to be and do everything for everyone. This perspective of Dillen is extremely important in pointing out to the pastor that the focus, also in his or her self-giving, is not on the pastor but on the living Lord, who gives himself in the pastorate and the pastor in him to the flock or the wounded. The testimony of the pastor and those who are cared for and guided always points to Jesus, not to the pastor's sacrifice. The 'self-sacrifice' of the pastor is an act of love of surrender to God, as *participatio Christi*, but in our vulnerability, we recognise and confess that the sacrifice also has its limits, and in no way can imitate Jesus.¹¹

Purves' (2007:99) advice to the pastor is: Turn to the *Diakonos*, the One who serves, for he carries the load and burden of faithfulness in the ministry for you and for the sake of the people he has placed in your pastoral care. It's his service they need, not yours. Only his ministry is redemptive. Mystical union with Christ is the key to pastoral theology and the faithful practice of ministry (Purves 2007:100).

The framework for all pastoral work

In ministry, the pastor often reminds himself or herself of the framework within which ministry takes place. Firstly, all pastoral work begins within the framework and announcement of the love of God, for God is love (Jn 1 4:8) (Purves 2004:203). We therefore proclaim: Jesus Christ, who is God, loves you (Purves 2004:204). Secondly, love is lived in a pastoral sense through the quality of the relationship with a member. The pastor uses all the skills that deepen relationship, e.g. listening, acceptance of feelings, warmth of involvement, openness to another, presence, attentiveness, time, affirmation, transparency, sincerity, theological training, gifts, skills and talents in the service of ministry in Christ (Purves 2007:130).

Purves (2007:132) asks: What does the pastor do all week?¹² We testify of Jesus Christ and of his present living, ministry of grace to the member, to the cancer patient in the hospital, to the couple who want to get married, to the parents

11. A Christian spirituality (grounded in reality, stimulating cooperation and not considering suffering as valuable as such) that inspires pastoral care may help pastoral ministers to look at themselves in terms of being a "good enough pastor"... "Someone may know that he or she is loved by God in his or her whole person, not just under the condition of infinite self-giving, as in the form of self-sacrifice..." "Pastoral ministers have a vocation to develop their own strength and to seek ways to deal more constructively with their weaknesses. This does not mean, however, that they have to be perfect people" (Dillen 2017:6). "Unlike Christ's sacrifice, our sacrifice of thanksgiving (in our lives of grateful service) does not forgive sins; it is not perfect, nor is it redemptive. We share in Christ's priestly anointing, but we are not Christ" (Billings 2011:164).

12. Peterson (2011:273) tells of his neighbour who remarks on how convenient a minister's job is, with only the 1-day-a-week job. Six days of the week he is invisible and the seventh day unintelligible. "What do pastors do between Sundays? ... I wanted to develop a congregational awareness that was shaped under the influence of Sunday worship and that then infiltrated the hours and days of the week implicitly in every workplace and household. I wanted to develop a pastor/people relationship that included all the days of the week" (Peterson 2011:275).

anxious about the behaviour of a teenage child, to the business owner whose small firm will not survive, to the young parents who bring their child to be baptised, and to the family at tomorrow's funeral. The pastor focuses on speaking of God. As a fellow journeying mystagogue, the pastor repeatedly points to the present, living Christ, of which both pastor and member become aware, who is present here and now to deepen his relationship with pastor and member in these specific circumstances.

The hermeneutic perspective of awe

Pastoral care:

... always takes place within a certain context and culture, and the pastoral caregiver must have an understanding of the network of relationships and the interconnectedness of life within culture. A contextual hermeneutical paradigm is thus important. Pastoral caregivers have to approach the community as a participatory observant and observing participator from a perspective of 'not-knowing'.¹³ Pastoral caregivers have to master the carefully balanced art to journey with fellow human beings through all phases of life. The pastoral care relationship is based on trust that is built through being present in the life circumstances of those ministered to. (Du Plessis 2021:8)

In seeking the hermeneutical perspective of the pastoral engagement with the members through the triune God entrusted to them, and as a co-worker of and participant in the ongoing present ministry of Christ, this insight from Du Plessis (2021) places us in the midst of the context of the ministry in which Jesus is actively engaged in living through his Spirit, to take the pastor with him on his journey with his people. She adds an important point, namely that pastoral care will always take place from the perspective of our faith in God, as an indication of the metaphorical approach in the pluralistic dialogic pastoral conversation.¹⁴ The pastor keeps in mind that his or her pastoral care always takes place under the direction of the living Lord through his Spirit, who, as the true Mystagogue, journeys with the pastor and the person being served. The minister therefore journeys along, with Jesus Christ in obedience and submission to the Holy Spirit, but also in a relational ethical manner for the sake of healing those for whom Jesus gives himself in this process and of whom the minister is a journeying companion (Du Plessis 2021:8).¹⁵

Pastors must undergo constant transformation of thought and perspective so that they can see the people in their care

13. Cf. Peterson (1987:189) who emphasises that the pastor cultivates an awareness of his or her ignorance. There's so much about this person that I don't know at all. I don't know what God has been up to in his life so far. God and this person want to encounter. I'm simply just present, witness and journeying companion.

14. Louw (2010) describes the hermeneutical perspective of the pastor's ministry as follows: 'Pastoral care is the expression and representation of the sensitivity and compassion of the Scripture's understanding and portrayal of God's encounter, intervention, interaction, and involvement in our being human. The encounter between God and human beings takes place within the existential realm and context of everyday living. This encounter and intervention are called in traditional theology the covenantal encounter between God and human beings. In terms of practical theological terminology one can translate this covenantal encounter as the "praxis of God"' (Louw 2010:73).

15. Louw (1999:95) points out that salvation affects people, precisely because the Spirit is the indwelling principle of the new creature. Indeed, because of this pneumatological perspective of the pastorate, it must be said that pastorate is an encounter form of salvation that radically influences and transforms people.

as embraced by the love and grace of God (Purves 2004:207). Pastoral care as participation in the ministry of the grace of God presupposes a definite hermeneutical perspective – we look at the person, and minister to the person in the light of the fact that Jesus Christ lived and died for this person, and he was therefore forgiven and restored to fellowship with the Father – in his baptism this person died for sin in order to live anew now (Rm 5:4). You see and understand the person in front of you as God’s person, irrevocably appropriated by God, even if the person is not aware of it. You look with God’s eyes and heart. The minister as a mystagogue is convinced that this person’s life in Christ is not our work, not even the person’s work; therefore, we listen with boldness and dedication to the movement of the Spirit that leads the person on God’s new way (Purves 2004:208).

Louw (2010:79) uses the term ‘*fortigenesis*’¹⁶ to explain the hermeneutical perspective. In the paradigm of a theology of affirmation, ‘*fortigenesis*’ denotes existential and ontological categories rather than mere inner emotional strength and positive behavioural attitudes. A theology of affirmation refers to an ontic state of existence, which means that one is affirmed in one’s being-qualities. Spiritual *fortigenesis* and *fortology* refer to that kind of spiritual strength and courage that comes from our new being in Christ. Regardless of the current condition of the person being ministered to and guided by the minister, the minister keeps in mind the ontic condition of the member as a new being in Christ through baptism. From this perspective, the right ‘entrance ramps’ are searched for together with the member, precisely with the aim of confirming and guiding the member in the direction of new courage and hope and the rediscovery of his or her baptismal identity as a ‘beloved child of God in Christ’.

The pastor’s primary task is therefore not to solve problems, but to listen to the ‘entrance ramps’ that lead from the statement of the problem to the reality of the person’s life, that is, the person’s union with Christ (Purves 2004:187).¹⁷ The pastor and member listen to the Word together, so that the member’s circumstances are interpreted and transformed (Purves 2004:188). The minister sees and guides the member to see himself or herself in the light of the Word (Purves 2004:190) and stands in awe of the living Lord’s guidance through his Word and Spirit.

The minister may only minister because the Lord Jesus shows up as the present, living Lord, where people live and die, and testify to the Lord who is present, even before

16. *Fortigenesis* (*fortis* = strong) refers to a perspective, which relates human wellness to the positive components in human behaviour. This approach concentrates on those components in human wellness that create strength, courage and a positive approach to life demands’ (Louw 2010:78).

17. Craig Barnes (ed. Van Driel 2020:129) believes that the experience of mystical union with Christ is at the heart of Christian faith. ‘But the reason they call the pastor in the morning is because they want to know if God has a word that can break the silence and cast out the anxiety. That pastor will have to find a 100 different ways to say, “You are God’s beloved child. With you God is so pleased.”’ (ed. Van Driel 2020:133) ‘Therefore, the goal of pastoral care is to witness the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people back to life through their union in Christ’ (ed. Van Driel 2020:133).

the pastor arrives. The hermeneutical perspective is always that your member has been chosen to be God’s friend. In baptism, he or she was forgiven and restored to fellowship with God. We need to invite and enable a conversation in which a member’s story and the gospel story intersect so that a deeper understanding of a life situation in terms of Jesus Christ takes place (Purves 2007:137). This is mystagogy in its purest form.

Peterson (2011:136) testifies in his memoirs to the erroneous hermeneutical perspective of the pastor on their members, namely, to view them as ‘problems’.¹⁸ They are not problems to be solved, but mysteries to be honoured and held in high esteem (Peterson 2011:136–137). The pastor’s job is not to fix people (cf. Eswine 2015:89), but to guide people in the worship of God and to live in union with the living Christ. In Peterson’s dealings with them as a pastor, he was involved in mysteries, which had to do with God, which were far beyond his understanding and control (Peterson 2011:140). That is why Peterson (1987:188) speaks of the attitude of awe – the members of the minister are called the image of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, part of Christ’s body, someone for whom Jesus died, whom he loves with his life. The path that Jesus walks with the member is much longer than the path of the pastor and his member. Long before the pastor got to know his or her member, God gave himself to the beloved child of his at the member’s baptism, to become one with him or her (Jn 1 4:19). The pastor consistently guides his members with the awe of God’s lifelong involvement in their lives.

A ministry clothed with awe, one of the essential qualities to participate in the ministry of the risen Jesus, begins in the pastor’s heart and becomes part of his or her way of life. You marvel at what God is doing in the ministry you are participating in and how the living Lord is still working with people in this present time. Faith and a praying lifestyle accept mystery as part of the nature of things and people (Purves 2010:144). The simple faith habit of the *Examen* prayer of Ignatius of Loyola is such a handy tool to guide the pastor to look back on his or her day and marvel at the living God in ministry and in the lives of his or her members. ‘[R]ediscovery of the practices of discernment will be central to pastoral spirituality’, says Roger Owens (ed. Van Driel 2020:154), ‘I do see a renewed interest in the practices of discernment as taught in the Ignatian tradition’.

Strength in our weakness

The great danger in our ministry is what Purves (2004:230) rightly calls ‘*ministerial programmatic triumphalism*’. It is up

18. Brian Hamilton (2022:2) speaks of the pastor who, in search of identity, follows the professional model and sees its members as ‘cases’. If the pastor sees his members as ‘cases’ or ‘problems’, you may as well be a psychologist or social worker for them, thus in charge of affairs, but the unique calling of pastor will be superfluous in this case, because dependence on the living active God is unnecessary. ‘Ultimately, the core identity of every pastor needs to be their identity in Christ. It is always Jesus who is the Saviour in ministry’. ‘Anytime the pastor’s personal identity takes the place of Jesus, the pastor and the ministry are sure to suffer. When a pastor images their identity, it must be one in which Jesus is glorified’ (Rimmer 2017:25).

to the pastor to make up for weakness by developing a type of hyper-contemporary initiative-driven response of need-directed skills.¹⁹ Only the reality of the living Jesus' continued ministry makes our ministry possible (Purves 2007:16). We sometimes refer to 'our' ministry as if it were *our* property and as if *we* were making things happen (Purves 2007:25). It is only in mystical union with Christ that the minister shares in his competence and therefore in his ministry. The Lord's grace is sufficient, and the Lord's power is complete and is manifested in our weakness and vulnerability (2 Cor 12:9) (Purves 2004:233–234). This is part of the great mystery of our participation in the ministry of the present Jesus.

The question is not how Jesus gets involved in our ministry. Instead, because he is the living Lord, the real question is: Who is Jesus Christ and what is he doing, and how can I participate in his ministry? We find the answers in the classical Christian teachings of our participation through mystical union with Christ in his vicarious humanity and ministry (Purves 2007:12–13). The answer leads to the second question: How do we manage to share in Jesus' ministry? The spirituality that comes from encountering Jesus drives us back to the Bible again and again as we try to answer the question, 'Who are you, Lord?' Studying the Bible brings us to an ever-deeper experience of the presence of the Lord. When the minister immerses himself or herself in disciplines such as *lectio divina* and imaginative meditation of the Word, he or she experiences the living Jesus in Scripture in such moments, but also in his or her own life and ministry in the present tense. This spirituality is not in the head or the heart; it is in the head *and* the heart and in such a way that they are open to each other (Purves 2010:57).

The pastor has a ministry, but it is derived from and depends in all respects on Christ's continued ministry. His ministry is in the present tense (Purves 2007:52). God acts through the continuing ministry of Jesus, who is present to and for us in and through the grace of the Holy Spirit. God's redemptive ministry has an indisputable Christological character and means that the emphasis is always placed on Jesus Christ and not on us. The focus is on Christ's promised faithfulness to be present to and for us as God who loves, forgives and blesses us (Purves 2007:52–53). Participating in Christ's ministry means that the minister participates in his life, which means that who He is and what he does defines your ministry. It is not our ministry that makes Christ present; it is the present, living Christ that makes our ministry possible (Purves 2007:57). So, the question is never: what am I going to do with my member today, but who am I going to encounter with

19. Roger Owens (ed. Van Driel 2020:144) uses the term 'functional atheism', referring to Palmer: '*It's up to us now*: This is a shorthand way of naming what Palmer calls functional atheism'. 'For a genuine pastoral spirituality to take shape beyond functional atheism, with a renewed center in the God who leads, pastors are going to have to learn to yield to the Holy Spirit's sometimes painful work of bringing us to detachment' (especially the detachment from our attachment to recognition). 'We can, through postures of prayer that make us increasingly available to God's action in our lives, become open to the divine work of "loosening the chains of attachment"' (ed. Van Driel 2020:155).

them? Who is Jesus today, in the present tense, to me and the member I minister? The pastor does not bring Jesus with them on their visit. Jesus is already there with the member we are visiting. We trust God to be faithful. As a fellow journeying mystagogue, the pastor guides the member to become aware of the God who acts as Jesus Christ, now, through his Spirit (Purves 2007:57–58). We have no ministry except the one in which we participate through our mystical union with Christ. Jesus said, 'Without me you can do nothing' (Jn 15:5).

Purves rightly says, 'When we have a serious preoccupation with "my ministry", that ministry must be crucified' (Purves 2007:73). Everything that pastors hope will take place in a person's life with God remains beyond the pastor's own control (Eswine 2015:98). We cannot do everything that needs to be done, which means that Jesus will have to teach us to live with the things we cannot control or correct. Jesus leads us to the grief of men. Waiting and seeing what God is going to do is not a waste of time (Eswine 2015:99).

Purves (2007:107–108) speaks of *participatio Christi* rather than *imitatio Christi*.²⁰ So, there is only one ministry, that of Jesus Christ, in which we participate through our mystical union with him. When the ongoing and present ministry of Jesus Christ is lost to us, we fall back on our own resources, and ministry becomes something we do (Purves 2007:111).²¹ The pastor then expects of himself or herself, and the members expect him or her 'to make things happen'.

Holy Saturday or Easter Sunday

Purves (2010:11) believes that many ministers are caught up in the mood of ambiguity and powerlessness of 'Holy Saturday', the day of emptiness. There are no services, and it is a day without liturgy. We do not really know what to do because the day feels like an empty space (Purves 2010:13). It is a day of waiting and traditionally it is a day of fasting. The truth is that the ontological emptiness of Holy Saturday is devoutly replaced by effective ecclesiastical and liturgical planning (Purves 2010:14). Holy Saturday is an 'almost' type of day: the atonement is complete, but the victory has not yet been achieved (Purves 2010:15). We have not yet entered the reality of the Christian life in terms of Easter Sunday. With all our preaching and teaching, nothing much seems to happen in the lives of the people because we remain the people of Holy Saturday. The power, the joy, and the awe were lost. Joy has been replaced by fatigue (Purves 2010:16).

20. Referring to our 'imitation of Christ' in Philippians 2:5–8, Billings writes (2011: 137–138): 'Paul clearly sets the context in the familiar language of union with Christ, emphasizing the ethical implications of union with Christ. Readers are encouraged to avoid "selfish ambition," to act in "humility" toward each other, displaying the unity that comes in Christ. Indeed, the repeated admonition to be of "the same mind" is a reference to living into the oneness of the new identity in Christ'.

21. To state this fact even better, Peterson (2011:292) describes it thus: 'You are at your pastoral best when you are not noticed. To keep this vocation healthy requires constant self-negation, getting out of the way. A certain blessed anonymity is inherent in pastoral work. For pastors, being noticed easily develops into wanting to be noticed. Many years earlier a pastor friend told me that the pastoral ego "has the reek of disease about it, the relentless smell of the self".'

The resurrection of ministry is primarily about the resurrection of Jesus' ministry (Purves 2010:18). The resurrection of Jesus demands the resurrection of ministry from the mood of Holy Saturday because Easter Sunday and Ascension signify the resurrection and continuation of Jesus' ministry. Our ministry is to participate in Jesus' living ministry (Purves 2010:19). Because he has risen and ascended, we should also speak of him, think of him, and experience him in the present tense (Purves 2010:27).²²

The risen and ascended Lord Jesus is not now sitting in heaven with his arms folded, waiting for us to do something religious that he can confirm. Jesus has his own resurrected ministry and invites us to participate in it. When this happens, we serve in the mood of Easter Sunday.²³ When the emphasis is on us rather than Jesus, we find ourselves in the mood of Holy Saturday. This means trying to run the church and its programmes while the limelight falls on us, and our pragmatic skills for the ministry, which always takes our focus away from what Jesus is currently doing, to us who must 'make ministry happen' (Purves 2010:45). Without a clear central theological understanding of the present ministry of Jesus and our participation in it, everything is in vain, and we are mere shopkeepers.²⁴ Our ministry is defined by the ongoing ministry of the living Jesus (Purves 2010:45). We therefore choose to trust the testimony of our baptism, that he has taken us into mystical union with him in his life and ministry, even when we do not feel his presence or see his hand at work (Purves 2010:55).

Ascension means that Jesus has an ongoing ministry.²⁵ Our ministry bears witness to the central Christian truth that Jesus lives. Purves (2010:70–71) gives some very useful and topical tips to make us and the members aware of the ongoing present ministry of the living Jesus in our midst: Speak intentionally of Jesus in the present tense²⁶ Emphasise that Jesus is our contemporary.

22. Edwin van Driel (ed. Van Driel 2020:2) confirms: 'As the resurrected One he is alive and active, and as such is present in the life of the church and the ministry of the pastor. In fact, his presence and work are the *sine qua non* of any church life and any ministry, as it continues and upholds the church and its ministry, even when we ourselves have no idea what our next step might be'.

23. Marva Dawn (in Peterson & Dawn 2000: Kindle Location 1923–1924) refers to our resurrection life as follows: '... the way to help our neighbours know Christ is to live his resurrection life in us so that they realize how Christ makes a difference and want to participate in his life too'.

24. Eugene Peterson (1987:2) mentions that the American ministers are leaving their posts one after another. We remain ministers, still minister to congregations, and receive our salaries from the congregation, but we have forgotten our calling. He calls us good shopkeepers who draw customers to us with good marketing strategies.

25. Coenie Burger (2011:33–34) rightly puts it as follows: 'Without a clear understanding of the ascension, we can easily think that Jesus is not here now and cannot or will not do anything for us now. It would be a great pity, because we serve a living Lord who is also with us now, watches over us and can help us in our need. Jesus wasn't just a Lord and Savior 2000 years ago; He still is today and for all eternity' (*authors' translation*).

26. Daniel Louw (1999:344) calls this the modality of the *praesens*. Especially in moments of suffering, the pastor communicates the presence of the living Lord. The effect on the person being served is that it offers comfort and strengthens, and confirms communion with the living Lord (Louw 1999:145). The pastor as a fellow journeying mystagogue in Christ's focus is on the resurrected Lord's presence and guides to the awareness of Jesus' nearness, especially in the pastoral encounter and the worship service. It also brings peace to the pastor that he or she is not tasked with 'making things happen' but to participate in the ministry of the living Lord.

Celebrate the Lord's Supper as a fellowship with a living, present Lord. Preach in a way that people meet Jesus through the Spirit. The whole point is that Jesus wants to meet and bless his people in the present tense.

The Spirit takes up this Word, the Word we read and preach. The ordinary alphabet, the everyday voice, the life-giving Spirit's breath, and ordinary people respond to God's presence. Bread and juice, or wine, are for sale around the corner. Yet here he draws nearer; we taste and see not only the dough and crushed grapes, but the goodness of the living Christ. To remember him is an encounter with him. He meets us with his true presence, as we chew and swallow and pray in faith (Eswine 2015:250).

It is ministry in the confidence that he is still the Saviour, and that salvation is not our concern or responsibility, setting aside all messianic pretensions and therefore rejoicing in carrying the lighter burden (Purves 2010: 126–127). Scott Hagley (ed. Van Driel 2020:105) reassures, 'Christ is the one who ministers to the world, and we are the ones who participate'.

So, what is needed is no more new techniques. Only by abiding in Jesus as our first responsibility will we participate in his ministry and find joy in it. To be inoculated by the Father in the vine, Jesus Christ, means that our being, identity and nourishment come entirely from him (Purves 2007:118). Without abiding in Christ, we have no ministry (Purves 2007:119), 'Abide in me as I do in you' (Jn 15:4). There is an intrinsic connection between fruitful ministry and personal prayer, Scripture study, general worship, especially participation in Holy Communion. Purves (2007:45) encourages the pastor to spend time with Jesus. He asks for our time. You cannot serve in the Name if you do not abide in the Name (Jn 15:1–11).

The compassion of Jesus Christ sought

A minister who serves God in weakness and vulnerability, with gratitude and praise, in mystical union with the living Christ, will live something of Christ's compassion (Nouwen 1994:40). It is the compassion of Christ that flows from the heart and soul of the minister to those who need it so much and yearn for it.²⁷ Wolterstorff (1987) describes his experience as follows:

When you say: It's not so bad, you are not sitting with me in my grief, but at a distance from me. What I need to hear from you is that you acknowledge how painful it is, that you are with me *in* my desperation. To comfort me you must come close, come and sit beside me on my mourning bench. (p. 34)

27. Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human' (Nouwen 2017:244).

But you can just sit on the mourning bench for a while. We who suffer with others can become victims of the same acts of our love. We become victims, and exposure to too much suffering can destroy us too.²⁸ Nolte and Dreyer (2009) rightly ask:

Does Reformed theology offer space for the insight that pastors experience emotional wounding, and that that wounding does not have to be denied, but can serve as a source of encouraging and meaningful engagement with others with the same and different types of wounding? (p. 2)

Ministers' service as wounded healers is therefore particularly to understand people. Ministers who see themselves as 'shepherds and pastors', who, with the help of the Bible and their theological traditions, provide the 'right answers' to people's problems, will have difficulty listening to people, and therefore also difficulty to understand them. Wounded healers are people who, firstly, treat their presence (*being*) with others with seriousness, and secondly concentrate on what they have to do (*doing*).²⁹ Being present with others implies that pastors will listen to others, 'be' in silence before saying or doing anything (Nolte & Dreyer 2009:4).³⁰ In this, the pastor participates in the ministry of this wounded Healer, Jesus Christ, who is still to be found in the worst places of pain, in mystical union with him, so that the focus of being present does not fall on the minister himself, but on the present living Jesus in him or her, but also in the person being ministered to. Even in quiet moments, the pastor and member meet the Jesus who is present for both and gives himself to minister and member (Louw 1999:342).

Compassion rooted in the life of God

Purves (1989:12) says that the pastor needs Christian pastoral spirituality. Compassion deeply rooted in the life of God revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth – compassion reveals the inner nature of God, the companion beside us on our mourning bench. A compassionate life is only possible for us

28. The author did not detect burnout in the participating ministers in this research, but did detect clear signs of compassion fatigue because of their constant exposure to illness, death, grief and trauma. The countryside often demands that the pastor have more exposure, because he or she often takes on the roles of marriage and family counsellor, psychologist, social worker, arbitrator, etc., because of the absence of these specialists in his or her congregational area. So, the pain is never referred.

29. 'Yet anyone familiar with ... the Psalms will know that the time-honoured way of supporting the grieving is simply to be with a person, to cry together and not to "fix." Instead of trying to help people minimise or even avoid their grief, I will be trying to help them enter the depth of their crisis and find spiritual meaning there. ... the pastor will have the strength to *do* far less in relation to suffering and *be* far more. Pastors will not give in to the temptation to fix the sufferer and will engage in a ministry that honours the sufferer' (Hamilton 2022:3). It is necessary that the suffering member experience, in the presence of the pastor, someone who dares to linger in the pain and sorrow with him or her. Together the minister and the one in sorrow will discover: The living Lord is right here where we are.

30. Daniël Louw's (1999:310) remark is strongly reminiscent of the role of the fellow journeyer, when he points out that ministers are often faced with the difficult challenge of 'what should I say?' or 'what am I going to say to the people in these circumstances?'. This tension is a reality among ministers. The pastor only comes to rest when he or she realises that he or she does not need to say something. Ministers are so accustomed to knowing and doing functions being the most important, that they forget that the encounter is essentially about the 'being functions'. 'Someone said: The task of the spiritual director is "to show up and shut up"' (Nicol 2010:29). Margaret Guenther relates how, when she is busy with spiritual guidance, she constantly prays as follows: 'Dear God, help me to pay attention! Dear God, help me to keep my mouth shut! Dear God, let me put myself out of the way! Dear God, let me be wholly present to this person, your child' (Guenther 1992:18).

in and through our relationship with God in Christ and the result of that relationship with Christ. The love we have for our fellow man is the love that comes directly from God. Weil (1973) describes this love of God in us:

God is not present, even if we invoke him, where the afflicted are merely regarded as an occasion for doing good [...] In true love it is not we who love the inflicted in God; it is God in us who loves them. Compassion and gratitude come down from God, and when they are exchanged in a glance, God is present at the point where the eyes of those who give and those who receive meet. (pp. 150–151)

In the gospels, compassion is a verb used in reference to Jesus, and our ministry of compassion flows from our relationship with Jesus Christ (Purves 1989:16). We read so often about Jesus, when he looks at people: 'He took pity on them (him, her)'. It is precisely the compassion in Jesus' ministry that makes him involved in the lives of others for the sake of healing. The Greek term 'σπλαγχνίζομαι' – to bring one's inner self into motion or agitation – is used nine times in reference to Jesus (Purves 1989:18). The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word 'רַחֲמִים' [*rachamim*] to describe God's compassion, which literally translates as 'the wounded womb of God', and signifies the powerful emotion of deep concern for the welfare of his people (Hosea 11:8). The *rechem* [womb] pain in solidarity with the suffering of others is a 'motherly feeling' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:886). The compassion of God in the Old Testament gives us a glimpse of God's maternal solidarity with his people (Purves 1989:68–69), a poignant description of God's love and heart.

Compassion is part of Christ and the pastor's priestly ministry. In compassion, Christian ministry comes from Jesus' heart wounded by the suffering of others, Jesus' *σπλαγχνίζομαι*, God's 'wounded womb' that the minister in union with Him 'feels in his own body'. The pastor is then the vulnerable *diakonos* who is on a journey with and in Christ and in this way is fellow-journeying mystagogue with their members (Purves 1989:34). Compassion asks us to go to where it hurts, to go into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, anguish – to cry out together, to mourn, to cry, to be weak with the weak, fragile with the fragile, powerless with the powerless (not the privileged who bend down to the less fortunate, high after low that rises from failures³¹), – go straight to the people and places where suffering is at its worst and build your home there (Purves 1989:35). The compassion of Christ in us and we in him motivates us precisely to go with him to the places of pain, and to discover with his loved ones: Christ is now here in this severe pain. We have no other path we can walk than the one Jesus walked. He came to the place of worst pain, the place where Israel and the whole world were in dire need (Wright 2000:126).

31. Leslie Newbigin (1995:181) draws steps that go down and up. At the bottom of the steps is the cross implanted: 'God exposed himself in a total vulnerability to all our purposes and in that meeting exposed us as the beloved of God ...' 'God comes to meet us at the bottom of our stairways, not at the top'. This is the place where the minister will have to be found as a *diakonos*, at the bottom of the steps, emptied from the self.

Phil Zylla (2017:2) describes compassion as, 'a moral emotion but also pathocentric virtue'. Compassion will lead to a feeling of shared anxiety, a desire to change the situation, and actions that alleviate the cause of the suffering perceived.³²

This move into the circumstances of others is *participatio Christi*, always with him and in him, also with the expectation of finding him in and with the one who suffers.

When we look at Jesus, we see God's face and God is understood as the God who suffered (Purves 1989:71). We get a glimpse of God's Trinitarian life³³ (Purves 1989:73). Within the Trinity, we find a particular inter-affectivity, namely, open to each other, affected by each other. Compassion is part of God's Deity (Purves 1989:75). God as Trinity's way of life is compassion, as the Persons 'living together' within the Godhead (Purves 1989:78). Jesus Christ entered into the depths of our sin, by becoming like us, and enabled us to become like him and in compassion God still enters our brokenness, to make his holy home in our vulnerability and to be our friend and companion walking with us through the valley of death (Purves 1989:80). God sits beside us on our mourning bench (Agüero 2005):

Thus, the compassion of Christ consists in his embracing the pain of humanity, owning it all, and from that experience of suffering being present to the pain of the world healing it and making it whole, reconciling all in himself. (p. 38)

The problem with suffering is that it often paralyzes us. To suffer with someone still means to suffer. What, then, keeps us from being drained (Purves 1989:83)? The pastor must first realise that pain is part of the life experience, and we must be careful not to rob suffering of its mystery. Suffering is much more than a problem to be solved (Purves 1989:85). Apathy is often a response to suffering: Our instinct is to avoid suffering because it reminds us of our own vulnerability and temporality and therefore apathy can be a buffer, numbing the mind, freezing the psyche and even being psychological

32. Zylla (2017:2) understands compassion as follows: Firstly, compassion is a moral emotion that holds the conviction that all suffering, however small or large, deserves response and includes a desire for relief from that suffering 'for the sake of the sufferer'. Secondly, that compassion is a pathocentric virtue that evokes deep feelings of pain and distress at the pain and distress of others. Thirdly, that compassion is a dynamic process that begins with identification with the suffering of others and moves to action, sympathy and alleviation of the causes of suffering identified. And finally, that, from a Christian theological perspective, compassion is a radical call and orientation to move into the situation of the suffering of others with active help.

33. Jürgen Moltmann (2015:359) put this aptly: 'To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in Trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son'. It's probably the worst pain imaginable. 'The Son who offered the perfect sacrifice of loving obedience to the Father on the cross is not the Father, but he is truly God as the Father is God. The being of God himself is involved in the suffering of history. And through the Spirit the Christian can share this suffering, knowing that in doing so he is in touch with the very being of God himself' (Rm.8:18-27) (Newbigin 1995:26). Simone Weil (1973:123-124) describes God's sorrow, his grief as the terrible distance: 'The infinite distance between God and God, this supreme tearing apart, this agony beyond all others, this marvel of love, is the crucifixion'.

self-protection for the minister who has too much to do with suffering³⁴ (Purves 1989:86).

The minister as a mystagogue can go a long way in giving words to people's suffering. The language of suffering is the language of lamentation, crying, pain, words, and language that describe the situation and articulate suffering, calling the pain by name and appropriating it. In biblical times, lamentation was an act of the community. When people wept, it was with friends who entered the loneliness of those who were suffering, shared pain (Purves 1989:90³⁵). A minister is not a doctor whose main job is to take away pain. Rather, they deepen the pain to the level where it can be shared (Purves 1989:91), but each time with the assurance that Christ and the pastor in Christ are together in this deeper pain that is appropriated as we await Jesus' healing.

Purves asks the question: Is compassion limited? How much compassion are we capable of? (Purves 1989:92). Referring to the Good Samaritan (Purves 1989:93), Purves says that, if the minister picks up every wounded person, he or she will soon be exhausted, angry, disillusioned, and full of despair and burnt out (Purves 1989:94). If they do not pick up each one, there is guilt that paralyzes their ministry.³⁶ Only because

34. Daniël Louw (2021) expresses his concern about apathy in people who must care for others because of too much exposure to trauma and suffering. 'Over the years, little attention has been paid to a practical theology of compassion'. How, then, should a theology of compassion and the *praxis* of pastoral care respond to these incredibly challenging phenomena of apathy, indifference, laziness and weariness of life? (Louw 2021:1). 'Antipathy becomes an extreme mode of apathy, namely a resistance to all forms of pathos with the tendency to withdraw and to deliberately avoid the realm of kindness, charity and comfort', 'the subtle art of "I don't give a f*ck"' (Louw 2021:2-3). 'Apathetic indifference and cool reaction within the rude disguise of "not-giving-a-f*ck" can therefore be described as a means of survival' (Louw 2021:7). 'In pastoral ministry, life fatigue is currently called "compassion fatigue" – the cost of caring. Caregivers begin to suffer from an overexposure to trauma'. They become emotionally traumatised by helping suffering people on the path of harm. Compassion fatigue then describes a kind of mental exhaustion, the barrier caused by exhausted hope; 'It is about a kind of normal recognition of personal limitation, helplessness, and hopelessness within the milieu of commitment, motivation, and meaning'. Compassion fatigue, burnout and vicarious suffering all have in common that they are related to the affective component of caring and represent an apathetic attitude toward caring relationships. 'Compassion must therefore be interpreted in terms of the vicarious suffering of Christ to overcome ministry sloth and an apathetic attitude that leads to indifference and the trauma of compassion fatigue' (Louw 2021:12). 'Compassion in pastoral theology describes a new point of view in life and new way of being, being-with (solidarity, camaraderie, and friendship); be for (intimacy and commitment), and to be in place of (transformative exchange)' (Louw 2021:14).

35. In 2014, Prof. Jannie Hunter (translator of the book *Klaagliedere* in the 2020 Afrikaans translation of the Bible) completed the assignment to write a commentary in Afrikaans on Lamentations, which for some reason was never published. With his permission, the author refers to his unpublished commentary, precisely to shed light on the communal suffering of God's people. Lamentations are written in a poetic structure and are, of course, also a lament, meant to be sung as Congregation. However, the Hebrew title is different and comes from the Septuagint and the Vulgate and just means 'Tears'. In the current text of the Hebrew Old Testament, the book is simply named after its first word, which simply means 'Oh' (Hunter 2014:2). The reason for writing Lamentations was the fall of Jerusalem in 587BC (Hunter 2014:4). The text is thus a reflection on the appalling and devastated conditions in which the city and its people found themselves after war brought the final destruction of the city. What is significant is that the poets did the description in such a way that there could be no doubt within their religious thinking that the Lord, to whom the final plea is made for help, would respond to their cry for help for the salvation of the city (Hunter 2014:5). The Lamentations helped to articulate and share the pain with each other, but also to remind each other in this way that God is faithful to his covenant and will listen to their lamentations again as in Egypt at that time and give a way out. So, the lamentation did not remain in pain but moved on to hope.

36. Daniël Louw (2015) writes about 'Compassion Fatigue', which in turn differs from burnout, in the sense that burnout rather refers to fatigue in terms of professional identity and the overwhelming feeling of incompetence, while compassion exhaustion refers to fatigue in terms of activity and quantity. 'Professionals suffering from burnout tend to become less empathetic and more withdrawn and end up considering a change of profession and the option of quitting. In the case of compassion fatigue, the tendency is to continue to give oneself fully to the patient or traumatised persons, with an awareness of how difficult it is to

we have been taken up into Christ by Christ who took upon him our own wounded humanity, sealed by our baptism, are we able to participate in his ongoing life for the world (Purves 1989:95). Our life in Christ and the work of ministry cannot be separated from each other – spirituality and ministry belong together.

The reappropriation of reformed spirituality

Reformed spirituality includes that we place ourselves before God day by day, that we can come home to ourselves by accepting our true humanity. Only then can the minister, as a human being, truly also come home as a fellow journeying mystagogue next to those who so need the compassion of Christ. The spirituality of the pastor is their spontaneous action and response to the experience of our mystical union with Christ, and the longing for the deepening of this relationship, for the glory of God and the benefit of the pastor and the members they serve. The spiritual disciplines help us to place ourselves before God and deepen our relationship, thereby enabling us to participate more fully and faithfully in God's life (Purves 1989:116).

Compassion is a verb. It is 'hands-on' with intimacy, solidarity, and, if possible, immediacy. Professional distance is taboo. Compassion is present and involved, it makes contact, it touches,³⁷ it is the ministry of relationship, in which the pastor is a travelling companion and in compassion walks the path with others through their suffering, with them in the mystery of suffering (Purves 1989:128). People are guided to Christ, where they can 'taste and see' that the Lord is good. Compassion is the ministry of Jesus Christ through which he personally enters into someone else's brokenness (Purves 1989:130). The pastor's compassionate ministry is *participatio Christi* ministry, in mystical union with the living Jesus, where he they enter with him and dwells in his people's worst pain.

(footnote 36 continues...)

maintain a healthy balance of empathy, engagement and objectivity' (Louw 2015:1). The question posed by Purves, 'How much compassion are we capable of?' is very topical in the case of the ministers who participated in the author's research. They love their calling and yearn to pick up each one along the way and walk with the guilt of often not being able to walk the road to the end with so many lying along the way and couldn't possibly get to everyone. Sharing this with each other, they have already experienced relief (Haasbroek 2024:231).

37. John DelHouseaye (2019:1), professor of New Testament and Spiritual Formation at Arizona Seminary, delivers a paper at the 71st 'Evangelical Theological Society' meeting in San Diego on the value of touch in the pastoral encounter. Jesus ministered in what may be called a "low contact" culture but makes a point of touching people. A leper, a menstruating woman, a corpse – all were identified as unclean in the Mosaic Law and avoided by the scrupulous, but Jesus touches or is touched by them all. The Incarnation changed how God saves people: touch is now a constituent of healing. God cured Miriam and Naaman from leprosy through Moses and Elisha respectively, but neither touches the patient'. This cultural background may explain the desperation of the sick for touch in the gospels. According to the head of the synagogue, Jairus, Jesus is to touch his dying daughter (Mk 5:23); A bleeding woman must touch his clothes (vv. 27, 30, 31). These abuses overwhelm Jesus. A woman loosening her hair in public would be considered erotic, which made the scene scandalous. She does not touch Jesus to be healed, but to express love and gratitude that she has been forgiven (Lk 7:36ff). Jesus embraces the little children (Mk 10:13–16). Jesus' embrace can be seen as an acceptable embrace, an assumption of a parental role. His subsequent blessing suggests that he adopted the children to pass on an inheritance to them before he died, and in this way 'save' them (DelHouseaye 2019:5). 'Following Jesus, our intention for touch should be compassion, a desire for the recipient's wellbeing. We should also explain that our external touch is mysteriously related to God's internal Trinitarian touch' (DelHouseaye 2019:9). An example from the church's history is Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) who loved to distribute alms everywhere. One day he handed out alms to a leper, and while giving it, and the leper stretched out his deformed hands to receive it, Francis suppressed his disapproval, took the leper's hand, and kissed it. The leper then approached with his face and gave Francis the kiss of peace. Then something broke inside Francis (Ghezi 2002:119).

Without Jesus, we can do nothing and will probably pass 'on the other side' (Lk 10:31, 32). Everything changes when the pastor moves towards the misery of people, expecting to find the living Jesus there, already offering his compassion, and himself to the beloved. To show up to people in mystical union with Christ as a fellow journeying mystagogue takes the heavy burden off the minister's shoulders to try to do something to make things right or better. They may now just 'be'.

Agüero (2005) describes how his intimacy with his God modifies his relationship with others:

When I have the courage to be alone and attentive to God's presence within me, I realize that I become more reverent and gentler in my relationship with others, both in my community of faith and in my ministry. It is there, in that centre where I am alone with the Beloved, that the transformation of my heart and soul takes place. I am recreated and renewed in the image of God, and so I become more like Jesus: loving and compassionate (Col 3:10). (p. 42)³⁸

It deserves to be mentioned that compassion and empathy are not limited to suffering. Also, the joys of the people in the congregation, the tears of joy, the successes and highlights in their lives are enjoyed by the pastors together with their members, which therefore means that we as a mystagogue will also take a seat next to them on their 'joy benches' and dwell there. If we consistently minister 'in Jesus', He will also lead us to the wedding in Cana to share in his joy. It is the wonder of ministry that we can stand broken at the grave with Jesus, with his loved ones, on Saturday and rejoice sincerely on Sunday with the family who bring their newborn little love to the baptismal font smiling and place him or her in the triune God's embrace (Haasbroek 2024:234).

Conclusion

The minister is relieved of a heavy burden when he or she becomes aware that his or her ministry is *participatio Christi*, participation in the life and ministry of the living present Jesus, through his Spirit and by virtue of our engraving through our baptism. We learn to accept and communicate through the ministry to which we are called, that we do not let things happen, but that Christ continues his ministry after his resurrection and ascension, inviting us to minister with him, giving him the opportunity to minister in and through us. Our mystical union with him through baptism,

38. 'However, I am very much aware that this contemplative attitude requires discipline and determination. I know that resistance to this intimacy with God shows up quite often in me in many different ways: I become busy in many important things and disregard my daily personal prayer; I pretend to be doing centring prayer when in fact I am just wandering from one thought to another without being open to God's presence in me; I become self-absorbed, worried and get caught in my own limitations and insecurities ... The result of this off-centredness has immediate repercussion in my competitive ministry: I get impatient, manipulative, and my need to be recognized and appreciated for what I do affects my attentiveness to the mystery and uniqueness of others. The most important principle of spiritual life is indwelling of the Most Holy Trinity where God's own life is the doctrine of the Divine communicated to us. Through the incarnation God becomes involved in creation. Jesus Christ is the full manifestation of God's love. The unconditional love that exists in the Trinity invites us to participate in its stream towards total self-surrender and total self-giving. Opening our hearts to the fullness of God's presence within us, brings us to share in the dynamic of the Paschal mystery; Christ's passion, death and resurrection are assimilated into our life by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Silence, solitude, and prayer become a source of compassion and move us to action' (Agüero 2005:42–43).

instilled and confirmed in the Lord's Supper, motivates us to make all that we have received from him: our theological training, our gifts, talents, skills, time and strength available in service to his ongoing ministry. The minister is therefore fellow journeying mystagogue, journeying with and in Christ, but also with the members whom the living Lord has entrusted to his or her care. This also means that the pastor will experience that, from his or her intimate relationship with Jesus, he or she will find him again and again in the ups and downs of his or her members. As a journeying companion, the pastor incessantly points to the presence of the loving and compassionate Christ in the lives of his or her members. It fills the pastor with awe to discover, experience and participate in the living Lord in the ministry.

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