

### LONG VACANCIES AND UNEMPLOYED MINISTERS—THE CAUSE AND REMEDY.

Every now and then there are lamentations because of the persistent continuance of desolating vacancies of churches which were at other times regarded as permanently established. Right along side of this fact, it is a painful fact that some good, godly, pious ministers, who have proven themselves also good and faithful pastors, are unemployed. I want to say that most of the reasons given for the above condition are one-sided and some time severely unjust and injurious.

In The Visitor of January 30th, page 4, the matter is handled again, and the author deals kindly with the problem and endeavors to answer the question, "Why is this so?" He properly says: "Ministers of Jesus Christ are never idle. Such men may from various causes be without a pastorate, but to speak of them as idle is a painful thrust at the truest, loving, devoted servant of God, whose heart yearns to shepherd the flock of Christ, and whose hands stretch out for work in the Master's vineyard." No! not "idle," but "unemployed;" and that very often without any fault of theirs. I realize too that even this term, "unemployed," is not the best word. "Without pastorate" would be a more just term, but is too clumsy.

1. I want to bear testimony here to the fact that I have known some of the most pious, zealous, pastors and preachers to be sidetracked for a season when it seemed almost impossible to secure pastoral work. A few after exhausting every honorable means to return to their heaven appointed work turned to secular labor, for a season, because they would not and could not be idle.

2. On the other hand I have known certain congregations become vacant and it seemed simply impossible for them to secure a permanent pastor although they had used every lawful means to that end. Many congregations have been lost to the church because of too many and too long vacancies.

3. Passing by the fact that there is occasionally a man who is really idle he is likely so because he was idle when he had a church to serve; and laying aside the fact that there are congregations which have troublesome men and women in

them who disturb the peace of the church and cause good and pious pastors to be removed:

4. The fact remains that the fault does not so much lie with the men who are sidetracked, or the churches that suffer from long vacancies. The fact is that there are good men without pastorates; and there are churches which were once strong and have even now a devoted, kindly people, but are vacant and are anxious to be supplied. Any one acquainted with the inwardness of the church's work knows that the desolating evil complained of is not a sentiment, but a painful fact. The serious question remains, "What is the best remedy?" I reply after close study:

5. The remedy is not found in finding fault with the vacant churches or the unfortunate ministers. The blame does not always lie there. This method has only made matters worse. It has led up to the theory of calling only settled pastors to vacant churches and thereby creating a new vacancy, often even harder to fill.

6. The remedy is not in the synodical supervision by the president or a committee to act in the matter, for both have failed, and that for the best reason, because those men were too busy with their own work to give proper attention to vacant churches. Neither does the employment of a synodical missionary help the matter. His work rather increases the number of vacancies by creating weak mission stations unable to support themselves for some time to come. All the above and other methods have been tried and have failed because they do not reach the root of the evil, namely, they do not supply the need. After an experience of a number of years in this department of church work I am persuaded that the best remedy is found in the following plan:

7. Let each synod solicit the services of one or more godly, pious, experienced and well-informed pastors to devote their time to supply work. Let the synod appoint such a man with the understanding that the churches support the man so far as they are able, and the synod supplement his salary where the churches are too weak to pay a living salary. In many instances the pastor himself would relieve synod by supplementing the salary from his own means. At all events the additional salary would be a small matter. Let

such a man be recommended by the president of synod to a vacant congregation. Let it be understood that he comes to the vacant church as a supply pastor; that he will help the church set matters in order; assist them in righting any disturbance; counsel them in selecting a permanent pastor. But have it understood that the supply pastor will not leave the church until they are permanently supplied and regularly at work again. Such a man might have to remain with some churches three, six, twelve months or more. You will see how this plan will keep the churches in regular lines of work, make regular returns to the various boards and will be saved from becoming the prey of other denominations while shepherdless. But above all such a plan would cheer and encourage the members of those churches and make them realize the benefit of synodical care and Christian sympathy. This plan is the most effective method of bringing the vacant churches and unemployed ministers into working order.

Of course I don't dream that such a plan should become a dominant law in the synods or apply to those pastors and churches who plan their changes months in advance. Indeed if pastors and churches could only be persuaded to agree to remain with each other until by mutual agreement a successor be secured, that would soon lessen long vacancies and unemployed ministers. But that happy condition will not come this side the millennium. The man entering such a work must of course expect to live an unsettled life; but he will soon learn that he is doing more important work than he could possibly do in settled pastoral work. We are living in an age of special departments of work. The demand is upon the church for such men and work and the sacrifice is no greater than the calporteur, deaconess or missionary department. I have now given over five years to this department of church work and I am persuaded and have the facts at hand to show that I have accomplished a larger work in the church than I could have done as a settled pastor. This conviction is growing on me, and year by year I receive letters expressing gratitude for the work that I have done for such persons or churches. There are many minor elements in my plan I cannot now weary the reader with,

but any synod will be able to work out the minor details. I wish just to say yet: That during the interim that such a supply pastor has no vacant church to work at he can help other pastors with profit in special work, or look up needy districts within synod and do mission work.

Fraternally,

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### ANNIVERSARY EXERCISE.

On the evening of the 2nd February St. Barnabas' Mission Sunday-school of Charleston, S. C., held its eighteenth anniversary service. The exercise consisted of the rendition of the regular order of service used by the school with the addition of special music and recitations by five of the girls, after which Mr. C. J. Morgan of the Seminary delivered an earnest and impressive address. He chose as the basis of his remarks Neh. 4:6, "So built we the wall . . . for the people had a mind to work," comparing the difficulties the Israelites had to encounter in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem with the discouragements and oppositions the Christians of today meet in their work for the Master. He emphasized the fact that where there is co-operation coupled with a mind to work the greatest difficulties may be overcome.

Superintendent Grice's report showed that a greater interest was manifested in the school than that of the previous year. While the enrollment, which is 121, is not quite as large; the average attendance, which is 79 is better.

The offering of the evening amounted to \$5 15.

Another commendable feature of this mission work is that there is connected with it a sewing school which has for its object not only to supply the poor children with needful articles of clothing but also to teach them lessons of industry.

The punctuality, earnestness, and devotion to the cause of missions that characterize the teachers of this school are worthy of imitation. They seem to have imbibed something of the spirit,

"That man may last, but never lives,  
Who much receives, but nothing gives."

K. Y. U.

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