



Building a Legacy

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I couldn't let the memory go. Boxes of dusty, fragile books were tucked in the far reach of the attic under the octagonal window. I hadn't been looking for them. My find was a fluke. The owner had moved, as had all of her belongings... except for three or four boxes in the dark attic, where not even the realtor had ventured. During the open house, I couldn't resist a peek, but I left with only my memory of books that desperately needed to be rescued and saved.

To my great delight, the home was purchased by someone we knew. I had the temerity to ask whether I could have the books and was grateful for the positive answer. Some were beyond rescue, nibbled and wormy. A few, however, made it out of the attic and to my home.

The first of note was a 1909 edition of *Little Men*, by Louisa May Alcott. What thrilled me was the inscription: "To my Boys and Girls." It continued, "Read aloud to them many times at Normal School." The inscription was signed by Emily W. Strong in 1916. It set me to researching about "normal schools" for the education of teachers. Wisconsin's Normal School located in Milwaukee was authorized by an act of the legislature in 1880, and the school was formally opened in September 1885. Emily W. Strong was a teacher and critic for 3rd and 4th grade instruction according to historical records. In this book, read lovingly to her students, her legacy continues now more than a century later. I wonder about the influence of this book and this teacher in the years leading up to my discovery.

From time to time, congregations ask me about finding pastors, as if the Presbytery keeps them in a darkened attic ready for service. We dust them off and, if not too wormy, install them in vacant pulpits. The truth is, of course, most pastors come from congregations, where they were nurtured and educated and encouraged to seek out ministry as a vocation. The same holds for commissioned ruling elders or commissioned pastors, church members who feel called to ministry but not necessarily to seminary. We depend on our congregations to identify people from their midst who should be considered for pastoral ministry.

Do you know someone – or, perhaps, are you someone – who has heard the Spirit whispering to look at ministry as a calling? Just as Emily Strong trained teachers at the turn of the last century, so also are we eager to train people for pastoral ministry in all its forms. The Presbytery's Commission on Pastoral Ministries is working with people who are exploring a call to ministry as Inquirers or Candidates to become Ministers of Word & Sacrament. We also welcome church elders who might want to deepen their ability to serve a particular congregation through preaching and the sacraments as a Commissioned Pastor. Our website has [information about what these roles require and the processes](#). It doesn't commit you to anything to poke around or ask some preliminary questions. Maybe your suggestion to a gifted leader in the church will be the confirmation and encouragement they need to pursue ministry.

As the church, we are responsible for leaving a legacy of educated pastoral leadership. The need already exists, and it will increase in the future. A century from now, how many ministers and commissioned ruling elders will we have trained? How many people will they, in turn, have discipled and supported in our congregations? May they be like the stars in our night sky.