

Memo on M.E.M.O: Pastorally prophetic

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 23, 2002](#) issue

The best part of my job is that Martin Marty occasionally sticks his head into my office, calls me “Boss” with a twinkle in his eye, and sits down to talk—as if he has nothing better to do. Along with Dean Peerman, Marty is a contributing editor and custodian of the magazine’s history and a steward of its favorite stories. (Marty’s association with the Century began in 1956, Dean Peerman’s in 1959.)

We know that for years many people have read the magazine from back to front—for good reason. Marty is back there.

Everyone who knows Marty has a favorite story about him—usually having to do with how much he reads, writes, lectures, consults, advises, preaches and travels. His schedule—even in his so-called retirement—is too exhausting for most of us even to think about. Somehow he still answers phone calls and e-mails promptly, and always kindly.

One of the things I like most about [Wendy Zoba’s profile of Marty](#) in this issue is that she focuses on Marty the pastor, a person who is just as much himself giving a children’s sermon as giving a lecture.

Zoba notes that a few of his peers have criticized Marty for not taking stronger stands on the controversial issues of the day. I don’t agree with that point myself, for I have regularly sensed a prophetic element in his column, though it is always conveyed in a pastoral voice. Marty doesn’t thunder; he prods, using humor and sometimes light sarcasm. He knows that thundering prophets are not often effective pastors, and that a prophetic pastor’s responsibility is to love and respect people.

The way Marty manages to be, with integrity, both an academic and a pastor is a puzzle to some and evidence of compromise to others. We call it a gift of God.