“The clergyman can not conduct his ministry successfully without trust,” says Schleiermacher (1850, p. 515) in his lectures. And Achelis (1911, p. 7) claimed that “the pastor only can gain effectiveness in pastoral counseling, when he comes to be a man of trust in his congregation.” We can conclude with Karle (2001) that trust is the conditio sine qua non for the professional praxis of pastors. In worship service the pastor’s style of preaching influences the religious experiences of people attending. In ceremonies accompanying life transitions (i.e. baptism, weddings and funerals), families pay attention to the style in which the pastor conducts the ceremony. Even people without religious affiliation have expectations in regard to the pastor’s role, for example how he or she cares for the local community. The pastor is an object of hopes and expectations, but also of assessment and evaluations. This includes and can be focused on the question of trust in the pastor.

In contrast to the practical-theological emphasis on trust in the pastor, we have only few empirical studies. Most of these studies apply contemporary approaches of leadership effectiveness to the field of parishes (cf. Nauss, 1989; 1995; Onnen, 1987) or use expert assessments (i.e., laypersons in leadership positions). Thus, the perspectives of church members have not been included in extant research. It is my thesis that research on religious praxis has to take into account the perceptions, behavior patterns and theories of ordinary people. Thus, it is the aim of this article to model parish member’s practice of trust. More specifically, we will ask which (perceptual) patterns lead parish members to trust or mistrust their pastor. A model of members trust will be introduced in three steps. First, two fundamental dimensions of pastoral relationships are introduced, constituting the pastoral circle. Second, common roles of a pastor will be localized in the circle. Thirdly, based on expectancy-value theory, consequences for the development of trust in the pastor will be predicted. After the introduction of the model, results of an empirical test of the assumptions will be presented. Did the model predict the distribution of trust and mistrust in the perception of the members?
The Pastoral Circle and the Expectancy-Value Model of Trust

Two Fundamental Dimensions of Relationships

For a pilot assessment of what is important for parish members to trust their pastor, I have conducted explorative interviews with 43 parish members (Gennerich, 2000). The interviews focus on characteristics of trustworthy pastors and on behaviors which disrupt a trustful relationship. These explorative interviews show that the expectations concerning the pastor are rather diverse: Some wish a friend for theological conversations, but reject the position of the pastor as expert, because it would violate their sense of equality and partnership. Others would like to keep some distance and limit the relationship to occasions of baptism and funerals, but expect a good sermon. Furthermore, not all community members assess themselves as religious. Some members wish to be addressed as Christians, others refuse any religious identity. Thus, an empirically based model of members trust in the pastor has to describe these diverse relationship-expectations.

To approach the construction of a theoretical model, two dimensions of relationship have to be distinguished and are assumed to adequately represent the diversity which I found in the explorative study. The first was elaborated by Luhmann (1968) in his theory of system trust and the second is based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981). Sociological approaches to the concept of trust distinguish between personal trust and system trust (Luhmann, 1968; Giddens, 1990). Personal trust is established through reciprocal self-disclosure and emotional involvement. It can be defined as the generalized expectancy that the other acts consistent with his self-presentation. Due to the private nature of personal trust, the wishes and interests of both individuals are assumed to be equal. The themes of relationship (e.g., love, leisure activities or gossip) are freely selected by the individuals because of personal motives (termed ‘individually selected theme’ in Figure 1).

System trust refers to the reliability of professional behavior performed by experts with approved competencies in a special domain of knowledge. System trust is incompatible with personal trust because of specific characteristics. The expert must control the “backstage” of his self-presentation to mask the impact of imperfect skills. Furthermore, personal feelings are ignored or should at least not be confounded with professional objectives (e.g., everyone can be a client if he or she can provide a case in the experts domain of knowledge; the expert is