

The Challenge of Pastoral Ministry • Rev. Dr. Robert G. Leroe



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Why this e-book?

Over the past 20 years I have been involved in the Mentored Ministry program of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and have shared with aspiring clergy the lessons learned in my military and civilian ministry. I’ve decided to put many of the areas we discussed into this e-book. My intention is to offer practical advice, which is why several of the topics are lists. There will be few personal anecdotes and very

little abstract theory. This also isn't a book about pastoral theology, but is based on it. This isn't a conventional book; you don't need to read it from start to finish. Read the topics you're interested in, and save the rest for when it is needed. I am writing primarily to seminarians and new pastors, sharing my experience and insight. While I do not claim *immaculate perception*, I hope my thoughts will be useful.

This e-book is dedicated to my wife Laura, with love.

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The Pastoral Epistles on the Pastorate

The Apostle Paul offers a checklist of qualifications for those engaged in the work of servant-ministry. Pastors need to be:

- *Above reproach* → literally “nothing to take hold upon.”
- They model pilgrimage, not perfection... but they need to try to avoid even the *appearance* of wrongdoing and live worthy of their calling.
- *Holy desire* → To “aspire” is “to set one’s heart on something. We place a high value on “calling” but Scripture stresses a willingness to be used.
- *One wife* → To serve as an example of faithfulness, so they can serve as marriage role models.
- *Temperate* → A life marked by moderation, limits, no extremes or excesses... balance.
- *Self-controlled* → a form of the Greek word σοφία, wisdom. To be prudent, sensible, with good judgment and personal discipline.
- *Respectable* → Orderly, a form of the Greek word κόσμος, the world or universe. One who lives in harmony with the way God created and intended the world to function; i.e. decently and in order.
- *Hospitable* → literally “loving the stranger” This is an attitude more than an aptitude; making people feel welcome is the key.
- *Able to teach* → Capable of communicating the truth of God’s word.
- *Not given to drunkenness* → Not an excessive, addicted drinker, abusing alcohol in a self-destructive manner.
- *Not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome* → A quarrelsome person displays an argumentative nature, often masking insecurity. Those who appear to be

looking for a fight are poor candidates for the ministry. Pastors should be peacemakers, not troublemakers. They have power under control.

- *Free from the love of money* → The principle here is covetousness, and there are many things to covet: power, status, security, popularity, a large, prestigious church, good standing in the community/denomination, and a generous pension.
- Must manage one's own family well... without being a stern, authoritarian tyrant. This is a reflection of one's pastoral leadership. *Caveat*: Parents teach and guide their children, but they cannot make moral decisions for them.
- *Not a recent convert* → Ministers must be confirmed by examination and observation. Sometimes new believers are too quickly elevated to positions of responsibility. New faith needs time to grow. Clergy need to be firmly grounded in God's word, and the proving ground of experience.
- *Good reputation* → irreproachable, moral fitness, maintaining a good witness. The pastor of a church represents the credibility of the parish, the "face" of the church.
- *Worthy of respect* → ones who are serious and honorable, individuals of integrity.
- *Sincere* → literally "not double-tongued" Honesty without hypocrisy.
- *Temperate* → They are not to take advantage of their freedom. In all things, moderation.
- *Defend the faith with a clear conscience* → Individuals with spiritual depth. Their lifestyles must be consistent with their profession of faith.
- *Monogamous* → faithful, devoted to one's family with unconditional love.
- *Good parents* → They offer love, guidance, support, firmness, and example.
- *Tested* → The church must consider their grasp of doctrine and the conduct of their lives. The inner call needs to be confirmed/verified by the church. An untested Christian is an unprepared Christian.

We cannot know people's intentions, but in time and with observation we can gain a glimpse of their reasons for entering ministry. A young man who wanted to enter the priesthood said, "I'd love to stay in my office with my dog and read theological books." He didn't wish to connect with people, which is what servant leadership is all about—living among the people. Some clergy spend an inordinate amount of time handling administrative matters and preparing their sermons (they're addicted to scholarship). They need to get out of their offices and do the work of ministry of presence.

Some people enter the ministry for all the wrong reasons: they desire the status and respect they think they'll get, and they assume it's an easy job. They often leave the ministry after a few years in the trenches. Seminaries don't do enough to prepare them for the "real world."

Pastoral ministry is a continuation of Christ's own ministry. Those who shepherd God's flock are called, appointed, set-apart by ordination, and given authority to nurture the church. Jesus was not a manager or executive. He lived with His disciples in a way that transformed their lives. Eugene Peterson defines "pastor" as "One who is passionate with God and compassionate with people." With every encounter pastors hope to bring people before the presence of God.

Pastoral care has been described as "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable." The church is full of hurting, broken people who need some encouragement; and stagnant saints who need to be shaken up a bit to grow spiritually. The aim is not to make people feel miserable but to make them think and change. A pastor should want the congregation to go from despair to hope, from fear to faith, from infancy to maturity, from spiritual complacency to holy zeal. Every believer needs a working-knowledge of Scripture and a distinctly counter-cultural Christian worldview. In an increasingly secular world this is a daunting task.



Surviving Seminary

Seminary is an intellectually stimulating, formative, and demanding experience. *How can you make the most of seminary?*

First of all, don't be in a hurry. Appreciate the process. This is not an interruption in life. If you view seminary merely as a *means* to a vocational end, you won't get all that you could gain. Once you start in the work of ministry you'll realize just how valuable your academic preparation was, along with the need to continue studying, to be a lifelong student, ever learning.

Regard seminary as a time of doctrinal development. Your biblical knowledge will be greatly expanded. Be open to opposing theological viewpoints, though they differ from what you currently hold. Don't be threatened by reading outside of your tradition or of engaging in conversation with people who differ with your perspective (especially in an inter-denominational seminary). Don't demonize people you disagree with or charge them with advocating false doctrines (we all too easily use the word *heretic*). Don't be that student who thrives on argumentation. Understand that there are essential and non-essential teachings. On many matters we can cordially agree to disagree.

More and more people are questioning the necessity of seminary. There are many highly successful self-taught people. They dropped out of school because it was interfering with their education. However, most of us need the discipline of seminary, the classroom interaction, the academic and spiritual formation that seminary provides. Once you earn your degree(s) you can study whatever you like; till then, you need to be directed towards books your school wisely knows you require to do effective ministry.

Some people enroll in seminary because the academic environment is appealing, a heady experience. Some work toward a seminary degree with no idea of what to do with it. If seminaries taught the practical matters of ministry, perhaps those who are there for the intellectual stimulation of theology might have their eyes opened to what they're going to need to do with this knowledge. Sadly, some seminary professors seem out of touch with the real world. While in school, don't neglect your faith in the process of studying theology. Feed your spirit by maintaining a disciplined devotional life. Find a prayer-partner or accountability group. Find time for contemplation. Attend seminary chapel services, conferences, concerts and forums.

Be active in a local church, and ask the pastor for mentoring and opportunities to do some experiential learning. Seminaries train theologians, not pastors, so you'll need to understand the practical matters of how to run parish councils, handle resource management, conduct weddings and funerals, baptisms, Communion, new members' classes, and perform ministry-of-presence. Case-in-point: the first funeral I ever attended I conducted, and I had no idea of what to say or do. My seminary never told me. A mentor can show you how.

Maintain a good, healthy relationship with your denomination and home church. Keep them informed. This is vital if you hope to be ordained and assisted in finding a pastorate or endorsed for chaplaincy ministry.

A **calling** is a vocation lived out as a willing, committed response to God's summons, based on a godly desire to serve, prayerfully verified by others. It is not a feeling or impression. Nor is it an obligation to follow the path of a respected relative. If you are resisting Christian work, this may well be a sign that ministry is not for you. I was told "If you can do anything else, do it." A true call will be a happy burden you're eager to take on.

Guard against self-serving, egotistical ambition. An occupational hazard of the pastorate is a need to be liked. You may think you're training to become the next best-selling religious author or mega-church celebrity. Re-think *why* you're in seminary. You may discover your path to be one of sacrifice and insignificance. Or God could call you to change the world. A hundred years from now your name may be a significant addition to Church History... or not. Be faithful, open, available, and see what God has in store for you.

Avoid arrogantly looking down on people who are theologically unsophisticated. You may think you've "arrived" by all your learning, but you still have to translate that knowledge for the "real world". Maturity is about what you are, not what you know. You can get straight A's and still flunk life. Acquire *humility*--God doesn't need you; He wants you.

If you desire to work towards a doctoral program, choose a thesis that you are so invested in that you would do the research even if it didn't lead to a degree.

Plan out your writing assignments so that you'll get them done in time. Writing is a major ministry skill, so give it your best effort. In writing sermons for Homiletics, learn to write in your voice. Read your work aloud; there's a cadence to good writing. Read--good readers become good writers.

Find time for exercise and recreation. Have interests outside of your vocational calling. Get adequate rest--take a weekly sabbath. Otherwise you may suffer burnout. Continue this after you graduate.

If married, don't neglect your family. Love them more than you love seminary. Encourage your spouse to take a few classes and to build friendships with other seminary spouses. The temptation to put work first will only get stronger after you graduate and get involved in ministry.

Along with way you will be developing a philosophy of ministry, one that will get tweaked in time. Seminary provides an opportunity to reflect on what ministry is all about.

Listen politely, remain dialogical; don't get into heated, divisive arguments.

Don't be that student who has to comment on and question everything.

Some of your professors will be duds. Get a good education in spite of them.

Seminary offers up role models, which is a good thing. Learn from them, copy some of their ideas, but be yourself.

Consider yourself blessed. This time of preparation is a *gift*.

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Finding a Denominational Identity

Some of us grew up in a denomination and we feel at home there. Many clergy have always maintained one affiliation. They were born, nurtured, and will die in one denomination. That's fine for some, but for others affiliation is a journey of discovery with many shifts and changes. It is not usually spiritual immaturity that causes people to change affiliation, and it is not uncommon to switch, particularly when exposed to other ideas and options, or if/when you find your theology has shifted.

Some people question the *need* for denominational affiliation, particularly when so many non-denominational churches are thriving. Not all of them are unaffiliated. More and more churches adopt generic names yet are members of established denominations. Determine if you think it preferable to be independent, while considering the advantages of affiliation. There *are* disadvantages.

Seminarians who wish to be unaffiliated have two choices upon graduation: Plant a church, or become proficient in networking for an existing position. Many of us lack connections, and we would not know how to go about finding a church with a pastoral opening. Many churches will not hire someone without an affiliation. And not surprisingly, many unaffiliated churches ask for help from denominations when they need a minister.

The first question before deciding whether to join a denomination or not is to determine where you fit. When I was in seminary, I jokingly thought of myself as a “Baptiterian”. I was somewhere between a Baptist and a Presbyterian. I discovered there is such middle ground, and became Congregational. Theology, and particularly, ecclesiology will help define your identity.

Pastors need *accountability*. Some denominations are more laissez-faire than others. Some micro-manage their pastors. Yet accountability is essential. Unsupervised, we can go astray. We need others to help keep us in line. Every pastor needs a pastor. Without supervision, a pastor could become cultic. Left to themselves, pastors can make unwise decisions. They can be tempted to justify a questionable lifestyle. They need someone above them to check on them and make sure they are doctrinally solid and living above reproach.

Pastors need *support*. I knew of a pastor of an independent church who got fired, and there was no one outside of his church to advocate in his behalf. In most denominations, a regional minister or bishop will get involved and provide an objective, outside voice of authority with the backing of the denomination. They safeguard the pastor.

Denominations offer *benefits*. Most have a group health coverage and pension plan. I know a minister who spent his career serving unaffiliated churches that paid him a subsistence salary. Upon retirement, he cobbled together barely enough money for

a very modest house and is living on Social Security. This is far from an ideal situation. His reward will be in Heaven, but he deserved more in this life.

Churches profit from denominational affiliation. When major repairs are required, many denominations send out notices, and individuals and congregations mail in financial support. When churches they have issues with staff, or when they're seeking as new pastor, denominational churches can be a major source of help. Unaffiliated churches are on their own when such needs arise. At regional and annual meetings churches enjoy the camaraderie and fellowship of fellow clergy. They have the comfort of knowing they're not in this battle alone.

Pastors need *identity*, a heritage. When ministers are asked their church affiliation, "Christian" does not adequately answer the question. What *kind* of Christian? Many of us dislike labels, yet the advantage of labels is that the public can better grasp who we are and what we believe. We strive for unity and we may regard denominations as evidence of disunity. Or we can view them as different expressions of Christianity. What unites us in Christ is greater than that which divides us. We can be ecumenical while loyal to our group. A word of caution: We can be too loyal. It's perfectly fine to think our denomination is the "best"...it becomes unhealthy, even cultic, to regard our group as the "only." The largest divide appears to be liberal versus conservative denominations (recognizing that some are mixed). It helps to align with a denomination that clearly and accurately who we are.

In short, denominations can help pastors and their congregations to be healthy outposts of God's Kingdom, a colony of Heaven.

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The "Call to the Ministry"

"Walk worthy of the vocation to which you have been called," Ephesians 4:1.

When going through the Ordination process, candidates will inevitably be asked about their *calling*. In his book *Decision-Making and the Will of God*, Garry Friessen describes how his vicinage counsel challenged his calling. He explained how he was academically prepared, gifted, and willing to serve. That somehow was not enough. The council was looking for something more subjective, a divine indicator, an inner impression from God. I met Garry at a seminar and asked what his council have said if he had told them he heard a voice, or an angel appeared to him. They would likely have said that was too much, too supernatural... yet they wanted him to admit to some kind of direct revelation.

Are you called? In communicating this to others, be prepared for the following questions:

- Why do you wish to be set apart for ministry?
- Do you have a strong desire to serve God?
- How have you demonstrated an ability to lead?
- How have you been involved in ministry?
- What evidence of spiritual maturity do you show?
- Are the characteristics of ministers from the Pastoral Epistles your personal goals?
- What are your qualifications, academically and experientially (your involvement in ministry)?
- You may not have a “feeling” or “impression” but do you have a *commitment*? We don’t trust our feelings for salvation, so why trust them for a “call”?
- What are your ministry gifts, and how have they been assessed? Have others verified your abilities?
- Are you compelled to communicate God’s word to people, to bring God himself near to their hearts? Do you long to see God’s people growing in their love and devotion to him?

- Have you had input from your church confirming/verifying your vocational direction?
- Could you just as easily do a secular job and be content?
- There are many avenues of ministry. What factors have led/influenced you to choose this particular venue?

It may sound like I don't believe in the concept of a calling. I do believe in it, and my own calling compelled me to enter the chaplaincy and later civilian pastoral ministry. One reason people feel a lack of job satisfaction is due to a lack of calling. Peter Kreeft observes: "If you do not believe in what you do, you cannot love it." Many people dismiss their work saying, "It's just a job."

A friend of mine calls himself an "ordained plumber." It matters what we do, and God has a plan for our lives, for each of us. C.H. Spurgeon stated, "There is no comfort more desirable than the confidence that you have aimed at doing your Lord's will."

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Ordination

Denominations differ on the requirements and procedures for ordination. Some require it prior to taking on a pastoral role, while others require candidates for ordination to be serving a church for a period of time to help prove the genuineness of their calling.

You will probably be asked **why** you want to be ordained. You need an answer, so do some reflection and self-examination and consider what has led to your desire to enter the ministry. Nearly every one seeking ordination is seeking something. It may not be to reach the world for Christ. It *may* be to gain attention, love, and respect.

A **Vicinity Council** will be convened, at which the candidate will be asked numerous

questions regarding doctrine and practice. The purpose of a Vicinage Council is to determine the understanding, preparedness and commitment of a candidate for the ministry. The following list of questions offers an idea of what to expect. If you can think on your feet and confidently answer most, you should do well. There may be a few matters in which you will need to admit you're still pondering. So long as they are not essential doctrines of the faith, you should be given a pass.

Most councils require an Ordination Paper in which candidates give their testimony, understanding of theology, and philosophy of ministry. In reviewing the candidate's paper, council participants look for areas that may indicate an inadequate grasp of doctrine. That being said, the council is not the place to parse the candidate's paper, but to seek elaboration on various aspects of doctrine. It is primarily an occasion to better understand a candidate's perception of ministry. Assuming candidates are doctrinally sound (from their academic preparation and paper), the council needs to discover if they are *ready to serve* in ministry.

The following *questions* provide an idea of what to expect at a Vicinage Council. I prepared this for councils after attending a few where area clergy came unprepared. I also give it to candidates so they'll also be ready. This is a lengthy but thorough section. You won't be asked all of these questions, but be prepared.

Theology...

- First of all, what are the *non-negotiable* doctrines for you?
- Do you ascribe to any of the historic church creeds and confessions?
- How do you perceive God as Creator, and why does it matter?
- Two of God's divine attributes are justice and mercy. How can God be both just and merciful?
- How is God both transcendent and imminent?

- “God is love”... in what way, and what *is* love?
- How would you explain to someone the doctrine of the Trinity?
- Where do you stand on the “openness of God” position?

Revelation...

- How has God revealed Himself? Explain the difference between revelation, inspiration, and illumination.
- What is the “big sweep”, the overarching message of the Bible?
- Is faith a prerequisite for knowledge of God or is there some form of general enlightenment which all possess?
- What is your understanding of the OT/NT canon?
- Describe the nature, necessity, and purpose of miracles, the supernatural element recorded in Scripture.
- Some clergy assert that they can remain evangelical while denying the inerrancy of Scripture. What is your position on this controversy?
- Address the nature and extent of the authority of Scripture.
- What advice would you give someone who is trying to select a translation of the Bible?
- What translation(s) do you prefer, and why?
- What exactly *is* “The Gospel?”

Hermeneutics...

- Explain what it means to literally interpret the Scriptures in light of figurative language and imagery.
- A member of your church wants help in understanding the Bible. What “tools” (basic reference books) of Bible study might you recommend?

- How do you use the Biblical languages in your study and proclamation of Scripture?

Christology...

- Explain the significance of the Incarnation, why it matters. Why was it important that Christ have a human nature and take on human form?
- In what fashion, and for what purpose, did Christ “empty” Himself (Philippians 2 / “kenosis”) by taking the form of flesh?
- If Christ was not able to sin, how could He have been genuinely tempted and function as our sympathetic High Priest?
- Describe the prophetic, priestly, and kingly aspects of Christ's personhood.
- What is included in the declaration that “Christ is Lord”?
- Liberation Theology describes Christ as a political revolutionary who came to bring the poor release from tyranny. Is there some legitimacy to this viewpoint?
- You're asked by a person struggling with the exclusive claims of Christ: “What about the person who has never heard the Gospel? Does God send such a person to Hell on the basis of not receiving a Savior of whom they have never heard?”
- Distinguish between the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ's death.
- Describe the intercessory work of Christ.
- Why does it matter whether Christ was virgin-born?
- Explain the purpose of the Resurrection of Christ and why it matters.
- Did Jesus know He was God?

Pneumatology...

- What is the Spirit's role in revelation and regeneration?

- What does it mean to be “baptized by the Holy Spirit” and when does this occur?
- What exactly did the Spirit do on the Day of Pentecost?
- How can believers discover their spiritual gifts and what do you believe are yours?
- The Holy Spirit is prominent in the New Testament; describe His activity in Old Testament times.

Anthropology...

- What is the extent of human depravity/inability?
- Are Adam & Eve representative/symbolic or literal/historic beings?
- Describe the original state of humanity prior to the Fall.
- How is the moral pollution of the Fall transmitted to humankind?
- Is fallen humanity still somehow in the image of God, and if so, to what extent?
- When does human life begin?
- How do you understand the “priesthood of the believer”?

Hamartiology...

- Define sin. Many people today claim sin is “mistakes” or “poor communication.” What is the nature of sin?
- What were the consequences of the first sin?
- What does it mean to be “fallen”?
- What is sin’s relationship to believers?
- What are the functions of the Law of God?

- Will the unregenerate be given a *second chance* after death? What will be the extent of their punishment?
- What happens when an infant dies? Is there an age of accountability?
- How does one determine what is lawful and what is unlawful, especially in what has been called the “grey areas” of life?
- Addicts say they cannot help their self-abuse. Are they responsible for their destructive lifestyles (and why)?
- Atheists claim that people can be moral and good apart from belief in God. What is your response to such an assertion?

Soteriology...

- How does God save sinners?
- Explain atonement and grace B.C., prior to the Cross.
- To what extent does God choose those who are saved? How do you understand the doctrine of election? In salvation, where is the initiative, with us or with God?
- What is the difference between resting in the Providence of God and fatalism?
- Theologians agree that lost persons are “free to sin”... are they also “free to trust God?” If so, how? If not, why not?
- What is the role of *repentance* in salvation? Is the act of repentance a means of working for one's salvation? Does repentance lead to faith, or does it flow from faith?
- How is the Law of God both perfect and yet, ineffective?
- “Saints” literally means “holy ones”; how does God make people holy? In what way are saints “new creatures” (II Cor 5) in Christ?
- Are the “saints” able to “persevere”? If so, how? Or can one “fall from grace”?

- Should perfection be the goal of Christians? Is perfection in this life possible? If not, then why not accept the fact and sin boldly?
- Can a person resist the grace of God and the “drawing” of the Holy Spirit?
- If God is sovereign, why pray?
- Since we are under grace and not under the Law, what is the relationship of the Law to the believer?

Angelology/Demonology...

- What is the nature and mission of angels?
- What was Satan like before his fall, and how did he fall?
- What is Satan's present position and ultimate destiny?
- A lot has been written on the occult. Just how active do you think Satan is on earth these days?
- Can Christians be demon-possessed?
- What is your view of exorcism?

Ecclesiology...

- What is the ekklesia, the church? Could a group of believers informally gathering for worship be considered a church?
- What is the relationship of a local church to its larger denominational body? -to the Body of Christ? -to the Kingdom of God?
- How do you envision the evangelistic focus of the local church?
- As the pastor of a local church, to whom are you accountable?
- Para-church organizations are an arm of the local church, yet they also compete for financial assistance. What might be your relationship with such organizations (e.g. the Navigators, World Relief, Prison Fellowship)?
- How should the local church support missions?

- Can believers truly be disciples apart from participation in a local church?
- How will you approach the delicate issue of church discipline?
- How might you respond to a person who claims to have had a bad experience with church and therefore does not attend any more?
- How comfortable are you in cooperating with clergy from other denominations?
- Does “tradition” matter, and if so, to what extent?
- What should be the church's response to anti-Semitism, and how ought the church regard the nation of Israel?

Ordinances...

- In an ordinance a “means of grace”?
- What is your view of baptism and how do you relate to those who hold differing views?
- How do you understand the nature of the elements of the Lord's Supper?
- At what point should children partake in Communion?
- Should we “fence” the Table or practice open Communion?
- On what basis might you decline to conduct a wedding?
- A young man who is a member of your church wishes to marry a woman who is Roman Catholic. How would you deal with this request?

Church Growth...

- What is your general philosophy of church growth?
- What method or methods would you use to help your church grow?
- How might you define ministry of presence with regard to outreach?

- What is your view of contemporary, needs-based, seeker-sensitive churches, as opposed to those rooted in tradition?

Eschatology...

- How do you perceive the return of Christ?
- Why do you think God has given us information regarding the future? What is the purpose of prophecy?
- How do you regard those who differ, who hold a different end times position?
- What is the “Kingdom of God”? Is it something past, present, future?
- What did Jesus mean when He said the Kingdom of God was *at hand*?
- How do you respond to people who proclaim that we are in the “last days” and that the apocalyptic events of Scripture will soon begin?
- What happens after death?
- Explain the resurrection of the body.
- A church member confides to you that he shares an eschatology that differs from yours. What affect, if any, would this disclosure have on his position of leadership in the church?

Apologetics...

- What is the value of Apologetics?
- Where do you stand in the controversy over creationism vs. evolution?
- (Theodicy) Why does God not prevent evil and human suffering from happening?
- What would you regard as cultic characteristics?
- Is there room for *doubt* in the devoted Christian life? When might doubt be appropriate? How would you define doubt?

Church History...

- Considering the heritage of our denomination, is there a person or persons you especially admire?
- If you could sit down and spend a few hours with any other figure from Church History, whom would you select, and what might you ask this esteemed individual?
- Many congregations have little grasp of church history; how might you go about educating them on their religious heritage?

Missiology...

- How should the local church be educated with regard to missions, and how ought the church provide support to missionaries?
- Respond to the critique of missionary organizations that claims they destroy foreign cultures. Is this criticism valid?

Family Life...

- In marriage counseling, a spouse claims, “I can't help the way our relationship has gone; I simply fell out of love.” What's your response?
- What do you accept as Biblical criteria for divorce?
- What sort of pre-marital preparation would you offer an engaged couple?
- What are some of the greatest challenges facing the family today?
- Society appears to be trying to re-define the family; what's your response to this? How might you respond to a request for a same-sex or inter-faith wedding?
- How would you describe healthy communication in marriage?

Pastoral Theology...

- What is the purpose of ordination? Is ordination necessary for one to assume a pastoral vocation?

- What would you regard as the single most important element of a worship service?
- You've been asked to conduct the funeral of an agnostic. How would you approach the service? What would be your focus?
- How would you define “stewardship”?
- What is your position regarding privileged communication and confidentiality in pastoral counseling? Are there *limits* to confidentiality?
- What role should believers play with regard to participation in politics? To what extent should clergy express their political views? How do you perceive the “separation of church and state”?
- Some churches are culturally and racially segregated. What role should the church take with regard to race relations?
- How do you prepare your sermons?
- What is your view on ecumenism? Would you have trouble working with clergy from other denominations?
- Do you have a pastoral role model? If so, how has this individual influenced you?
- Do you have a “ministry verse” which expresses your objective as a pastor?
- Pastors have been described as “wounded healers”. What does this term mean to you?
- What schools of thought or approaches to counseling have influenced your pastoral counseling style?
- How close/social or remote/detached should a pastor be to a congregation?
- Who should manage church funds and authorize expenditures?
- What should the church be doing to respond to the plight of the homeless?
- Many churches resist change; as a new pastor, how might you go about instituting changes in the way things are done?

- In your church are members of the Army Reserve. One of them has been struggling with whether a Christian should serve in the military, and whether one can justify war Biblically. Also in your church is an outspoken pacifist. How might you address their concerns?

Hospital/Hospice/Nursing Home Chaplains...

- A family in your church informs you that their mother is terminally ill and is in a persistent vegetative state. They are wrestling with the decision to permit the hospital to issue a DNR/do not resuscitate directive. What advice might you offer to assist this family in their decision?
- How do you differentiate between active and passive euthanasia, and would you advocate for either?
- What would you consider “non-heroic measures” in end-of-life care? Would you include hydration and nutrition?
- A young woman has just lost her first child due to SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). She feels guilty for the death of her child, and is also angry with God. How would you provide pastoral care in this situation?
- A terminally ill person wishes to be anointed with oil. Is this something you’re comfortable with doing?
- In what respect is hospital chaplaincy “incarnational ministry”?
- How many quarters of Clinical Pastoral Education have you completed?

Military Chaplains...

- Are you aware of the unique stresses of military life--deployments, unit involvement, frequent mobility, culture shock, a secular chain-of-command, unaccompanied deployments, bureaucracy, rank structure, isolation from the support of relatives, frequent change and uncertainty?
- Pluralism—Are you able to function within a religiously diverse and ecumenical environment, working with—and for—others of differing theological persuasions?
- Accountability—do you prefer to work isolated and independent, or are you able to function under close supervision? What is your view of authority?

- Role—what is your understanding of the function of a military chaplain and of institutional ministry?
- Physical condition—do you have any physical restrictions or limitations, and in general are you able to meet the demanding fitness requirements of the military?
- War—what is your position regarding conscientious objection and pacifism? Are you acquainted with “just war theory”?
- Not all assignments are “*muddy boots*”—a common perception of the military chaplaincy is being in the field with the troops, yet chaplains often also have desk assignments. What is your response to taking on administrative and resource management responsibilities?

Personal...

- Tell us a little about your growing up years and your present relationship with your parents.
- What was your life like before you became a Christian, and how did you come to saving faith in Christ?
- How might you describe your leadership style?
- What are your plans and goals for continuing education/professional development?
- Who are your favorite religious authors?
- Do you read the sermons of others? Whose preaching has impressed you the most, and why?
- What do you read, besides religious materials? What kinds of books—fiction and non-fiction, what kinds of magazines?
- What would you consider are your strong points and growing edges?
- What do you do to take care of yourself physically? How do you usually spend your leisure time? How do you manage stress?
- How do you structure your devotional life?

- Who would you go to with a personal problem? Do you have a mentor?

Questions for the Candidate's spouse/fiancé...

- Are you fully *on-board* and supportive of your spouse's calling?
- Do you have your own separate vocational calling?
- How do you envision your role as a pastor's spouse and your involvement in the local church?
- What do you like and dislike about being a pastor's spouse?
- The Bible indicates that husbands and wives complement/complete each other. How do the two of you make an effective team?

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Church Candidating

Unless you are in a denomination that assigns clergy to churches, you will be applying as a pastoral candidate, a process which involves contacting Search Committees, submitting a resume and cover letter, and hopefully being invited for an in-depth interview.

Denominations help with referrals to churches seeking pastors, and your seminary ought to have a ministry list of pastoral openings. There are several on-line places to seek available positions, and often best source of all is personal networking. Before sending a resume, go on the church's website to determine if you might be compatible, a good fit for this congregation.

For Candidates, it is essential to have a strong cover letter that expresses your interest, vision, and confidence. Include your statement of faith, to include your positions on Scripture, baptism, ecumenism, eschatology, and the charismatic

movement. Your resume should include your denominational affiliation, academic training, secular and ministry work experience, website, special skills, musical ability, publications, links to video sermons, reasons for leaving your current ministry, any special family considerations, and references.

Then be patient. The search process takes time. Hopefully the search committee will keep you informed; some won't. In the following section you will find what to expect from the churches you candidate at, what they are likely to ask you, and what questions you should ask *them*.

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Pastoral Search Committees

Forming a Pastor Search Committee

When pastors announce resignation or retirement, a search committee should be formed as soon as possible. The outgoing pastor may have some parting wisdom for this group and should be invited to briefly advise them. The interim pastor should be welcome to participate as a non-voting advisor.

Members of the Search Committee need to represent a cross-section of the congregation, with regard to diverse age groups and interests. Normally the leadership of the group comes from the various church boards, plus members “*at large*.” The church Nominating Committee may suggest potential Search Committee members.

Those selected need to be trusted, active members who have demonstrated spiritual maturity and are biblically sound. They need to demonstrate an ability to express their views, to maintain confidentiality and objectivity. They also need to be able to assure the (often impatient) congregation their need to be thorough in appraising the qualifications of candidates.

This process is often lengthy, and any search committee that operates in haste will likely repent at leisure. Thus committee members need to be committed to what can be a very prolonged, laborious process, and be able to handle the pressures of an anxious parish.

The church should consider formally commissioning the committee in a morning worship service, as a means of officially charging them with this responsibility, while praying for God's blessing and wisdom to guide them in this task.

The Interim Minister provides stability and pastoral care during the transition (so that the congregation is less likely to become impatient) and is not to be considered a candidate. Interims wishing to be considered for the pastorate should step down and go through the candidating process.

Committee Guidelines & Procedures

- Decide time and place for meetings and how often the committee should meet. At a minimum, every other week is appropriate, though many groups meet weekly
- Elect officers: chairperson, vice-chair, recording secretary.
- There needs to be one spokesperson for the group, one point-of-contact.

Members wishing to ask questions of candidates need to go through the spokesperson.

- Determine how to regularly report to the congregation, which will be eager to learn of any progress. A monthly report is recommended. The chair is usually the spokesperson for the committee, and may be asked to attend church council meetings in order to present progress updates. The spokesperson should give both a verbal report during morning worship and a written update for the parish bulletin and/or newsletter.

- The committee needs to decide up-front whether a unanimous vote is necessary in choosing a new pastor.

- The church needs to budget funds for committee expenses. This includes the cost of transportation, lodging and meals for candidates.
- The committee will coordinate with the denomination to announce the pastoral opening and be given information on potential candidates. They should invite regional denominational officials to attend a meeting of the committee to offer advice, answer questions, and inform the group of the overall availability of candidates.
- The committee will request, receive, and review resumes of potential candidates, check references, and decide whether to extend an invitation for an interview. One person is designated as the liaison between candidates and the committee.
- Establish a search committee email address.
- Invitations—the committee liaison will contact candidates by phone, arrange for an interview date, request a sermon video, and respond to any initial questions.
- Packet—prepare information packets for prospective pastors describing in detail the church and the community.
- All this work is supported by prayer for patience, wisdom/insight, discipline, and perseverance.

Dedication of the Search Committee

Charge to the Committee: Do you freely take on this task, trusting in God to grant wisdom as you appraise the gifts of candidates, and do you pledge to work together in harmony throughout this process? *(We do)*

Charge to the Congregation: Do you pledge to pray for our search committee members, and patiently allow them time to deliberate in their responsibility to find a settled pastor for Middleton Congregational Church? *(We do)*

Prayer: Gracious Lord, grant these, Your servants, discernment as they take on this task of choosing a pastor. Guide them as they read resumes, listen to sermons, and interview candidates. Grant them unity of mind and purpose. Shield them from

anxiety. Keep them focused. And we pray that our future pastor may be filled with Spirit-led zeal for the work of Your Kingdom, a compassionate leader who will help us grow in our understanding and application of Your word, for Your glory. We ask this, in Your thrice-holy Name, Amen.

Congregational Survey

Wise search committees will welcome and actively seek input from the congregation. One vehicle for determining what to look for in a pastor is a survey given to every member of the church. The results are to assist the committee and ought not be made public. Here is a sample:

-Sample Church Survey-

Your Pastor Search Committee would like for you to give this matter your prayerful and thoughtful attention. You are the Church. We want your suggestions and recommendations with regards to the selection of a pastor. This will help in the work you have asked us to do.

① How much pastoral experience should our new pastor have?

☐ Under 5 years ☐ 5- 10 years ☐ 10-20 years
☐ Over 20 years ☐ Does not matter

② What educational qualifications should our new pastor have?

☐ College degree
☐ Seminary Degree (MDiv)
☐ Post-Graduate Work (DMin)
☐ Clinical Pastoral Education
☐ Other:

③ A pastor has many important responsibilities. While he should be interested in all of the following, which do you feel should receive *most* of his time? (Check five)

<input type="checkbox"/> Sermon preparation	<input type="checkbox"/> Attending committee meetings
<input type="checkbox"/> Visiting prospective members	<input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral counseling
<input type="checkbox"/> Administration and Office Work	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal evangelism/outreach
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Bible Study and Prayer	<input type="checkbox"/> Community involvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Promoting church programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Visiting Church Members

_____ Caring for needs of his family	_____ Denominational Meetings
_____ Professional development	_____ Teaching
_____ Hospital/nursing home visits	_____ Other: _____

- ④ On which of these should he spend the least amount of time?
- ⑤ Should the pastor have some experience in secular work?
- ⑥ What do you feel is the most important quality a pastor should possess?
- ⑦ Share your thoughts about other characteristics you would like to have in a pastor.

Seminarians

Should search committees consider newly-graduated seminarians? They have to start somewhere. Some seminarians are older, seeking a second career. They have life experience in the secular world, which means they know first-hand the struggles of laity.

While some seminaries link students with local church pastors as mentors who can provide opportunities for involvement in parish ministry, seminaries largely train theologians, not pastors. New ministers need the opportunity to live in their new roles awhile. An MDiv doesn't guarantee success in the ministry.

In many denominations, seminarians serve for a year or two prior to ordination. Their first church convenes a Vicinage Council and has the honor of ordaining their pastor.

Congregational Responsibilities

- Pray for the search committee.
- Speak to the Chairperson only.
- Patiently trust the committee to do its work in its time.
- Offer encouragement and support.
- Refrain from pressuring committee members for information and results.

Intentions... By getting to know candidates we can get a indication of their reasons for entering the ministry. A young man who wanted to become a minister said, “I’d love to just stay in my office with my dog and read books.” He didn’t especially wish to connect with people, which is what servant leadership is all about. Some clergy spend an inordinate amount of time handling administrative matters and preparing their sermons (they’re addicted to scholarship). They need to get out of their offices and do the work of ministry of presence.

Pastoral Candidate Questionnaire

Have candidates provide input for the following...

- Name
- Address
- Phone & Email
- Spouse
- Children (and ages)
- Date of Ordination
- Denominational affiliation and any previous affiliations
- Home Church
- Academic training
- Secular work experience
- Membership in civic/social organizations
- Number of years in pastoral ministry
- Other ministry experience
- Have you ever been asked to resign from a church or para-church ministry?
- List 3 or 4 references
- Preaching style
- Website and/or blog
- Ministry strengths
- Special skills
- Musical ability
- Favorite religious authors
- Reason for leaving your last/current ministry
- Any special family needs
- Status of your health?
- Do you have any relatives living in our area?
- Are you bi-vocational?
- List organizations you belong to (civic, political, Masonic, military, etc)

- Preferred Bible translation, and do you have any problem with ours?
- Positions on: Scripture, baptism, ecumenism, eschatology, and the charismatic movement

Checking References

Contact references and send them the following questionnaire:

The Pastor Search Committee of (name of church) in (name of city) is interested in _____ . We have received his permission to contact references to check his personal and ministerial background. We would greatly appreciate it if you would take just a few minutes to respond to the following questions. *You can be assured that what you share will be guarded with the utmost confidentiality.* Please return this form in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

1. How do you know _____ , under what circumstances?
2. How long have you known him?
3. The following are several areas that our committee deems very important. Please evaluate _____ by using the following categories:

P = Poor F = Fair G = Good E = Excellent D = Don't Know

- Family life _____
- Spiritual maturity _____
- Evangelism/faith-sharing _____
- Pastoral care/visitation _____
- Compassion _____
- Works well with others _____
- Preaching _____
- Teaching _____
- Administration _____
- Counseling _____
- Handles conflict/criticism _____
- Dependable _____
- Money management _____

- Communication skills ____
- Ecumenicity ____
- Sense of humor ____
- Work ethic ____
- Crisis ministry
- Flexibility ____
- Emotional stability ____
- Decision-making ability ____

4. What would you consider his greatest ministry strengths?
5. Why do you think he is open to leaving his current ministry at this time?
6. To your knowledge, has he ever been asked to leave a former church? If yes, for what reason?
7. Are there any concerns we ought to be aware of--personal or professional?
8. What can you tell us about his family?
9. Would you be able to give us the name and telephone number of one or two other people who know him?
10. Can you recommend him without reservations?

-In addition, it is advisable to run a credit check and CORI on candidates.

Some candidates have not yet announced to their church or para-church ministry that they are seeking another position. Be careful in contacting those who might be unaware of this.

Eliminating Candidates

By going through resumes, search committees will find some that are clearly not what they are seeking in a pastor. It is not necessary to tell candidates *why* the committee has decided to pass on them, but it is proper to inform them that they are no longer in consideration. Some churches leave candidates hanging. For candidates who have made it as far as an interview it is important to thank them for their time and that you have prayerfully decided to select someone else. Wish them well in their ministry, expressing hope that God will open other doors for them.

Networking

Contact your denomination's hierarchy, check with your contacts, seminaries you trust, websites such as the Gospel Coalition, call people you know who might make referrals, and attend or send a delegate to your denomination's annual meeting. Often at denominational events there is an informal gathering specifically to bring together churches seeking pastors and potential candidates. Prepare a one-page advertisement for the position that briefly describes your church and community, your ministry goals, candidate qualifications, and what you expect in an application. Include a photo of the church, website, vision statement and contact information.

Initial Phone Interview

After eliminating candidates by appraising resumes and checking references, the committee is ready to contact those they believe are worth consideration. The next step is a conference call at which the following questions can be asked:

1. Please share your account of how you came to faith in Christ, and what has led you to seek to serve Him in pastoral ministry?
2. Tell us about the church/ministry where you're presently serving and *why* you are seeking a change in ministry.
3. Is there anything in our Pastoral job description and/or doctrinal statement you might have difficulty accepting?
4. Have you been previously affiliated with another denomination or faith group?
5. Do you have any financial struggles, such as student loans or other debt?
6. Is there anything in your past that we should be aware of as we conduct a background check?
7. As a settled pastor, how long do you envision your length of service at our church, and are you willing to live in the town?
8. Tell us a about your family/home-life.

9. Are you and your spouse “equally-yoked”? Does he/she support your vocation, and is he/she interested in being actively involved with our church?
10. Should we extend a call, how much time will you need for the transition?

The In-person Interview

Arrange for a weekend when the candidate can visit the church and be interviewed by the committee. Decide whether to invite the candidate’s spouse to the interview. On a Saturday the committee will hold the interview, and on Sunday the candidate will preach, either at the church or at a neutral location. The church should pay for transportation costs, lodging, and meals. With the candidates’ permission, interviews could be recorded or at least have a written transcript. Time should be allowed for a brief tour of the town, parsonage, and a walk-through of the church facility.

Questions for Prospective Pastors

Are pastoral candidates being properly vetted? Many search committees do not ask enough questions, or the right questions. They don’t probe much beyond the candidate’s resume. Below are some issues that churches need to know before taking the major step of hiring a pastor.

In planning for time, anticipate both follow-up questions and questions the candidate will likely raise. Some candidates may give very long answers, so the committee may want to caution them to be aware of the limited time restraints. Usually candidate interviews take an entire day with a break for lunch. The categories of questions:

Doctrine

- Does our doctrinal statement align with your theology, and if you were to change anything in our statement of faith, what would it be? Are there any doctrinal positions you hold that are outside of our statement of faith?

- What are the non-negotiable, essential doctrines for you?
- Are there any non-essential doctrines which you have not fully formed convictions on, or teachings you struggle with?
- What is your position on eschatology, and how important is this for you? Will you have a problem if your view is not shared by everyone here?
- What doctrines do you think need special emphasis in our day?
- What is your position on the role of women in the church?
- What happens when an infant dies? Is there an age of accountability?
- How has your theology changed in the past five years?
- Some clergy assert that they can remain “evangelical” while denying the inerrancy of Scripture. What is your position?
- What is your position on spiritual gifts, their use in the church, and how are you gifted? What is your assessment of the Charismatic movement?
- Some ministers have a *life-verse* and and/or a *career/ministry-verse* which encapsulates their aim as a pastor... what is yours?
- How do you discern God’s leading? What is your perspective on how one determines the will of God?

Worship, Ministry & Preaching

- You have read our church’s pastoral job description. Is there anything in it you might have difficulty accepting or implementing if chosen as our pastor?
- How would you define a healthy church, and what is the purpose of the church?
- How do you define worship?
- What would you consider to be the most important aspect of the worship service?
- What aspects of ministry appeal to you the most, and how might you be helped to develop and refine your skills?
- What do you expect of the deacons/elders?

- Pastors have been described as “wounded healers” (Henri Nouwen). What does this term mean to you?
- The Pastoral Epistles state that ministers should be “apt to teach”. How would you handle this responsibility of providing pastoral instruction?
- What programs would you like to introduce to our church?
- How would you describe a successful pastor and a successful church?
- What is your preferred style of worship—traditional, contemporary, or blended?
- How ought ministers be attired in the conduct of worship?
- How do you prepare your sermons?
- How long do you typically preach?
- What is your typical preaching style (topical, expository, textual, narrative, academic, story-sermons, *big-idea*, etc.) and do you use visuals?
- Who are some of your favorite preachers?
- Do you have any objections to other clergy preaching at our church?
- Are you comfortable with giving a brief Children’s Sermon during the morning worship and have you had any experience teaching children?

Ordinances

- Have you conducted weddings, funerals, baptisms and served Communion?
- What are your requirements or restrictions regarding performing weddings? On what basis might you decline to conduct a wedding?
- Do you have any restrictions on the conduct of funerals? Are you able to conduct funerals of unbelievers?
- What sort of pre-marital preparation do you have to offer an engaged couple?
- What is your view of divorce and remarriage?
- What is your view of tradition? Our church observes various events in the Church Year such as Advent and Lent. Some clergy oppose such religious observances.\

- Are you comfortable with anointing the sick and bringing Communion to people hospitalized and shut-ins?
- What is your view of baptism and how do you relate to those who hold differing views?
- At what point should children partake in the Lord's Supper?
- Should churches "fence" the table or practice "open Communion"?
- What happens when an infant dies? Is there an "age of accountability"?

Ethics & Counseling

- How should a pastor be held accountable? Who do you answer to personally and professionally?
- Please explain your views on church discipline. Relate any personal experiences.
- What role should believers play with regard to participation in politics? To what extent should clergy express their political views?
- What is your view on abortion?
- How does one determine what is lawful and unlawful, especially in what some call the "grey areas" of life?
- What is your counseling philosophy? What schools of thought or approaches to counseling have influenced your counseling style?
- How would you counsel a couple considering divorce?
- What is your take on legalism and liberty?
- What is your view on "open-and-affirming" churches?
- How would you welcome someone whose lifestyle choices may be counter to biblical teachings and guide them to a life-changing relationship with Jesus?
- What is your position regarding privileged communication and confidentiality in pastoral counseling? Are there *limits* to confidentiality?
- What is your position on church fund raisers?

- What do you *bring to the table* with regard to dispute resolution / peacemaking?

Evangelism/Outreach

- What is your approach to personal faith-sharing?
- How do you envision the evangelistic focus of the local church?
- What is your missionary vision for the church?
- What is your view with regard to “ministry of presence” and community involvement?
- Are you bi-lingual? If so, what other language(s) do you speak?
- In what sense is the church community of faith counter-cultural?
- How should churches promote racial reconciliation?
- What should the church be doing to respond to the plight of the poor?
- Can you work with female clergy, and female deacons?
- How might you respond to people who claim to have had a bad experience with church and do not attend any more?
- Our town has a Clergy Association. Are you able to work with other clergy in the community? What is your position on ecumenical/inter-faith cooperation?

Personal

- What would you say are your strongest qualifications and vocational weaknesses?
- How might you describe your leadership style?
- Have you had any difficulty with depression or anxiety?
- How do you handle conflict and criticism, especially when you feel it is unjustified?
- How would you describe your devotional life?
- What do you read besides religious materials?

- How do you balance your life between family and ministry?
- Do you have a mentor and/or a pastoral role model? How have they influenced you? Are you part of a peer accountability group?
- How do you refresh your spirit? What do you like to do for fun? Are you involved with any particular hobbies or interests?
- How do you handle stress? Are you a type-A or type-B? A workaholic? How do you respond to the statement, “*I’d rather burn out than rust out*”?
- How do you respond to criticism? Do you get upset easily?
- What was the most positive aspect of your formal training for ministry? What was the most negative aspect?
- Tell us about your Masters/Doctoral thesis and your goals for continuing education.
- Do you have any severe problems with your children or teenagers? (medical or psychological/emotional)
- Do you have any outside business involvements? If so, how involved are you?

Finally (*asked by the Chairperson*)...

- Should we extend a call, how much transition timing will you need in separating from your current church/ministry?
- How long do you envision your length of service with us?
- If you were to move here, what type of *housing* would you be looking for—purchase, rent, or live in a parsonage?

Note: A candidate’s interview is not a Vicinage Council to determine ordination, and you may want to limit theological questions to areas of special concern. Candidates should send their statement of faith to the search committee. Also decide on whether to have one or two individuals ask all the questions or assign each member of the committee a category. How long will this all take? Quite a while, especially if/when questions lead to follow-on questions. You may want to limit the number of questions to those you deem most important.

Outside Help

If your church is in a region with several other churches from your denomination, you may want to ask to have a group of local pastors interview the candidate and give their assessment. They are the experts on pastoral care and theology.

Answering the Candidates' Questions

Interviewing is a “two-way street.” Expect them to ask some questions. The following are issues prospective pastors need to know about the church and community which search committees need to be prepared to answer. The following ought to be in the informational packet provided to candidates the committee is interested in...

Background of the church:

- Denomination and other affiliations
- Church Constitution
- Articles of Faith
- Annual budget
- Church policies
- Church worship bulletin & newsletter
- Website
- Ownership of the property (who has authority to sell, add to the facility)
- Membership—how many active resident, non-resident, and inactive members
- Average attendance at worship services
- Sunday School participation and other Religious Education activities and educational facilities
- Church staff (secretary, treasurer, sexton, youth leader, associate pastor, etc.)
- Growth potential

- Boards—Deacons, Elders, Trustees, Missions, Finance, Religious Education, etc.
- Organizations—e.g. youth, singles, single moms, men’s groups, altar guild, hospitality, welcome committee, collations, etc.
- Worship style: traditional, contemporary, blended?
- Sanctuary space/size and equipment (sound, lighting, baptistry, pew arrangement, AV projection, instruments, carillon, etc.)
- Upcoming major financial facility improvements
- Office space and equipment (computers, copiers, fax, wi-fi, scanner, etc.)
- Parsonage (or housing allowance)
- Resource management—how is money raised, spent? Are there designated offerings, special projects (e.g. building campaigns), endowments/trusts, investments, and is the church in debt?
- How does the church deal with change?
- Does the church have any untapped ministry resources in the congregation?
- Missionary outreach work of the church, and local ministries (e.g. crisis pregnancy centers, homeless ministries, domestic violence shelters, food pantries, etc.)
- If the church closed its doors tomorrow, what impact would that have on the community?
- How does the congregation approach the use of technology and social media in the life of the church and specifically in worship?
- How do you expect your pastor to dress—in the office, and in the pulpit?
- History of the church; plans for expansion of the building or church planting
- What are the church’s programmatic plans/goals for the future?
- What are the most creative things the church has done in the recent past?
- What is the church’s attitude and approach to world missions/missionaries?
- Who is responsible for the website and library and how easy would it be for the pastor to make a significant input into each of these areas?
- The church’s strengths and weaknesses
- What challenges will I face if I take on this pastorate?

Theological Questions

- What is the church's statement of faith and how did the church devise it?
- What has been the most vexed theological question the church has faced? Has there ever been a church split over theology or polity? Why?
- What theological trends or false teachings might the church be particularly concerned about at the moment?
- How would you describe the theological diversity of the congregation?
- How would you describe the socio-economic and ethnic diversity of the church?
- What are the key functions/roles of the elders/deaconate?
- What is the elders/deacons' relationship to the pastor?
- What is the church's position on the ministry role of women?
- What is the church's position on the function of charismatic gifts?
- Is there an alternative kind of membership for someone differing on secondary doctrinal issues? Would it ever be considered?
- What kind of church government structure is practiced? How does it work out in practice?

Community Issues:

- Size and population of the town (include map)
- History of the town, and if there are special town events
- Social services available
- Other nearby towns and cities
- Area attractions
- Location and quality of schools and hospitals
- Location of the church in the community
- How the church is regarded in the community—its *image*
- Other churches in the area
- Clergy associations—is the church a part of the local pastors' group?

- Is there an area support group for clergy spouses?
- Activities for children and teens
- Nearby seminaries, Christian colleges and religious bookstores
- Community religious events (e.g. March for Jesus, National Day of Prayer)
- Community service groups (Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis)
- Community seasonal services (Lent, Easter, Thanksgiving, Advent)
- Community patriotic events (Veterans Day, Memorial Day)
- How one finds out about new families in town

Personal Matters:

- Job description (are pastoral duties clearly defined?)
- Salary, health, disability and retirement (403B) benefits. Pastors expect to be fairly compensated though it is their ministry that is most important—provide an employment factsheet covering the terms of the offer/call, and when extending a call, a formal contract.
- Is the pastor regarded as self-employed or an employee of the church?
- Parsonage availability (plus its condition, location, and if utilities and repairs are paid for), or is there a housing allowance?
- Transportation—vehicle provided or gas/maintenance allowance
- Professional development—if is a book allowance and funds budgeted for conferences and seminars.
- Regional denominational conferences, the area representative, and whether the church will provide funds for attending the national annual conference.
- Is an office provided for the pastor?
- Policy on pastoral absences and visiting speakers.
- What the church expects of one's spouse.
- Who evaluates the pastor's performance and who does the pastor report to?
- How easy is it to get fired? What kind of job security does this position have?

With regard to the former Pastor:

- How long the former pastor stayed and the average time held by previous pastors.
- Why the previous pastor left.
- Where the former pastor is now?
- Has this interim period been a positive time for the congregation?
- The involvement of the former pastor's spouse.
- The type of ministry the former pastor conducted (evangelistic, teaching, discipleship, exhorting, etc.)
- Are there things the former pastor did that you are hoping will be continued?
- Are there things the former pastor did not do that you want the next pastor to initiate?

Sermon Appraisal

Candidates being strongly considered will either preach at the church, a neutral location, or on video. Committees should inquire if candidates' sermons are available on-line. In some instances where sermons are not available on-line, candidates may submit their best sermon, and you want to hear a typical message. The committee might ask for a sermon given on a specific Sunday.

In evaluating sermons, the following should be considered...

- What I heard in one sentence, the "*big idea*"
- The text used
- Faithfulness to the text, and did I need to pick up my Bible again after the text was read?
- What engaged me the most?
- Main points
- Effectiveness of the Introduction & Conclusion

- How might the average attendee take this message?
- Relevance/application (“So what?”)
- Word choice... any undefined technical terms?
- In a long sermon, was the length necessary to make the point(s)?
- Eye contact
- Delivery, vocal variety
- Gestures and mannerisms

Extending a call

In many churches, the candidate is invited to preach at a morning worship service after which the congregation votes. The candidate’s family is invited. Normally this is not initiated until the committee is confident the candidate will be approved. To help the church make an informed decision, a factsheet on the candidate should be given to members with a brief bio, a summary of the candidate’s experience, education, publications, and any other pertinent information. A church dinner afterwards is an appropriate celebration.

After the committee votes to call a pastor, the chairperson should contact the individual by phone and discuss transitional and logistical arrangements--to include when the individual can arrive and start ministry, and moving arrangements. There should be a formal letter of acceptance sent by mail. Send a letter to those who are no longer being considered.

In some churches, the policy is for the Search Committee to make a recommendation to the church and have a congregational vote, usually by secret ballot.

Will the church pay for moving the minister and his family and household goods? If there is a delay between the family’s arrival and delivery of household goods, will the church arrange for lodging?

Orientation to the community should include the pastor and his family. A church leader, such as the search committee chair or deacon chair, should introduce the pastor to community leaders and area clergy. A church leader should offer to accompany the pastor's family when they enroll the children in school and help them learn their way around the community. A female member of the Search Committee should take the pastor's wife on a community tour, identify service providers, and provide all appropriate help to the pastor's wife if she is seeking employment.

The search committee will work with the deacons/elders to plan an Installation Service, normally an evening event attended by area denominational clergy, some of which will be involved with providing the charge to the candidate and charge to the congregation.

Installation Service

Usually a month after the new Pastor has arrived, the church holds a service of installation, inviting pastors from the community and denomination to participate. There is a charge to the congregation and the Pastor, special music, Scripture readings, prayers, the laying on of hands, and a Benediction given by the newly installed Pastor. More traditional churches often present the new Pastor with a stole. Then a fellowship reception follows with refreshments.

A final word or two...

God has given us wisdom and responsibility to make informed decisions. Our guidance is further supported by prayer and a working-knowledge of Scripture. The process is often frustrating. Be patient and persevering. Trust God to guide you, to give you enough light to take the next step. And when your new Pastor comes on board, if anyone remarks that he "has big shoes to fill," hopefully he will respond: "I brought my own shoes."

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Senior Pastor Job Description

Can you imagine taking on a job without a job description? Many churches assume pastors are both self-motivated and know what to do. This may be true with seasoned pastors, but those starting out need some direction. Here is a sample job description:

The Senior Pastor is the spiritual leader of the church and is responsible for the policies and programs of the church, answering to the Diaconate and Church Council, keeping them informed on all ministry activities.

Responsibilities:

- Coordinate and lead the weekly worship service—teaching, preaching, and applying Scripture to daily life.
- Shepherd the flock of God with servant leadership, as one who is relational, authentic, transparent, and humble, exercising the fruit of the Spirit.
- Assist in the promotion and implementation of the vision statement and mission statement of the church.
- Celebrate all church ordinances, to include: Holy Communion, Baptisms, Dedications, Anointing the sick, Weddings, Funerals, Confirmation, Prayer Meetings and seasonal special events.
- Provide pastoral counseling.
- Perform home visitation of congregation and visitors, and when appropriate, at their workplaces.
- Support the Religious Education program—teaching Bible studies, seminars, workshops, premarital preparation, membership classes, and participation in Sunday School & VBS.
- Attend board and committee meetings.
- Visit the sick, injured, and dying, offering compassionate clinical pastoral care. Conduct nursing home services.

- Oversee the Teen/Youth group, overseeing and mentoring the Youth Minister.
- Lead the church staff with guidance, planning, performance counseling, training, and regular staff meetings.
- Monitor and appraise the spiritual health of the congregation.
- Administrative duties include church correspondence, calendar, record-keeping, ministry logs, reports and review of resource management.
- Promote the work of the church through publicity, community involvement, and ministry of presence.
- Actively participate in the town clergy association, ecumenical services, and regional/annual denominational meetings.
- Professional development via continuing education, reading, conferences, seminars and sabbaticals.
- Remain on-call for emergencies.
- Adhere to our denominational ministerial code of ethics.
- Other duties as determined by the Diaconate with approval of the Church Council.

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The care of souls

Some people ask me, “When do you ever take a day off?” Others think ministers only work on Sundays. Often things come up on the day I’d normally take off, which means somehow coming up with creative, alternative times to break away from the duties of pastoral care. Lately I’ve been taking a few hours here and there to go kayaking in nearby rivers and lakes. Overall, a pastor is never “off-duty.”

Pastoral care is *task-oriented*, which means we can always find more to do. With every creative idea, there’s some work involved to implement it. Emergencies arise, people show up at the office unexpectedly, and there are lots of meetings. Then

there's the matter of sermon preparation. Pastors don't improvise; we take seriously the preparation of messages, which also helps us keep our professional edge.

Pastoral care has been described as being a “wounded healer,” a term coined by Henri Nouwen. Our own woundedness enables us to respond to the hurts of others. We comfort people with the same comfort we've received, and the compassion we've developed from dealing with our own pain. Before we can dry another's tears, we have to learn to weep. And while clergy can't identify with everyone's issues, pain is universal and unique. We all experience it, yet in our own way. So while I would never say, “I know how you feel,” I do know what it means to hurt. And I know that God cares. We have a choice in our pain--to become bitter or compassionate. Pain is inevitable; misery is optional.

Pastoral care is *relevant*. When I became an Army Chaplain, I learned all I could about the unique military subculture. When I retired from the Army and moved to Massachusetts, I studied the historical, political, spiritual, and sports culture of New England. I read *The Perfect Storm*, *The Hungry Ocean*, *The House of Seven Gables*, *The Delusion of Satan* (on the Salem witch trials), *The Curse of the Bambino* (about the Red Sox), and a book on how to talk like you're from here, just for fun. By the way, you can't “pahk your cah in Hahvahd Yahd”--there's no place to pahk! When I learned that the Northeast is the most spiritually indifferent part of the U.S., I realized that I was here as a *missionary*.

Someone told me, “I'd *hate* having your job, listening to people's problems all day long.” He was a CPA, and I told him I wouldn't want his job either. Fortunately God has equipped us with diverse gifts and interests. Pastors require a wide range of skills and knowledge. We need to be general practitioners, not specialists. We may not do every task equally well, but we have to manage a lot of matters: counseling, preaching, mentoring, teaching, praying, church ordinances, administrative matters, visitation, discipleship, worship, and ministry of presence. We can't excel at

everything. At a job interview the pastoral search committee wisely asked me: “What are you not good at?” and without hesitation I replied, “Resource Management.” Fortunately they said that’s OK.

Eugene Peterson writes about how he and another pastor were at a diner having breakfast and the waitress asked what they did for a living. Peterson’s friend said, “I run a church.” Peterson warns that “the vocation of pastor has been replaced by the strategies of religious entrepreneurs with business plans for the religious market.” At Trustees meetings I had to remind the group that we weren’t a business catering to religious consumers, and I was not their “product.” The people aren’t our customers. There’s a huge difference between a client and a parishioner. The secular world often treats us as a business. And some of us buy into it. In *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren talks of having good lighting, parking, publicity and sound equipment... but these things ought not become more important than *why* we’re there.

It has been suggested that pastoral care is “preparing people for a good death.” We deal with the eternal, ultimate issues of life. We face an audience of people who are trying to manage their kids, their jobs, their finances, their health, and we put things into perspective. We all know people who are missing the spiritual side of life. They need what the church offers, which leads to my next topic...

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“Why church?”

A comedian said, “God’s everywhere, so why do I have to go to church to see Him?” God is indeed omnipresent, but church, an institution God established, offers some things we can’t effectively get elsewhere. In making a case for church, consider the following factors, without which, we do not have a genuine church...

• **Worship**—corporate worship brings believers together into a community of praise. God deserves our worship and we need this experience to keep us centered. People don't come close to Jesus by forsaking the church. *Why worship?* We need it, Scripture commands it, and God deserves it.

• **Instruction**—we could be self-educated; we could read the Bible along with books on theology, church history, and the spiritual life. But just as we go to school, church helps us learn and grow, through pastoral instruction, Sunday School, and small group inter-active studies.

• **Fellowship**—being a Christian is something we can't do entirely on our own. We need others. We need their friendship, insight, and at times their warnings when we go astray. Church is where Jesus is Lord and people are loved. N.T. Wright cautions, "It is as impossible, unnecessary, and undesirable to be a Christian all by yourself as it is to be a newborn baby all by yourself."

• **Service**—being a disciple involves servant-leadership, so we are called to not just believe but to do things. "Faith without works is dead." Service takes us out of ourselves. Service is found in acts of kindness and discipleship. People need to do more than warm a pew; they need to get involved.

• **Outreach**—we've been commissioned to proclaim the Good News to everyone. Evangelism has been defined as "Beggars telling others where they found bread." Our lives are lifelines of the Gospel to others; we love others into the Kingdom. It's been said, "You're a Christian because someone told you the Gospel; now it's your turn."

What do people who come to church want?

Most people want **caring**, in a friendly, personable setting. People want warmth first, not just theological answers. Theology is critical, but if that's all people needed,

we could mail everyone a copy of a good systematic theology book and close the church. It's been said, "People do not expect from the church a constant stream of great statements. They expect love, concern, and caring."

Others might like us to **care less**; they seek anonymity in church, and don't want to get too connected, so churches need to give them space. They'd appreciate a "no passing the peace section." They miss out on fellowship, but we can't force community on people or shame them into staying afterwards for coffee. They simply want to worship in peace, and contemplate God without a lot of interaction.

Hurting people are looking for **consolation**, for shelter from the storm. Restless people want to be **challenged**. The oft-quoted goal of preaching is "to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." We need to be especially sensitive to the hurts people are experiencing. Remember: "Be kinder than necessary, for everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle."

People need **ceremony and ritual**. In and out of church they're looking for liturgy, whether it's a meaningful Communion observance, a house blessing, a prayer at a retirement dinner, a benediction on Memorial Day, or an invocation at a school Baccalaureate.

Parents want **religious education** for their kids. One of the most important things a church can provide is Sunday School. Many families when *shopping* for a church put Sunday School near the top of the list of things they're seeking. Parents know in today's secular culture how challenging it is to offset the world's secular values, yet they feel ill-equipped in providing a biblical worldview for their children. This is why some young couples who've strayed from church return when they begin having children of their own. Parents also want to encourage their children to make friends with other children from Christian homes. So spend the money on good curriculum, teacher training, crafts, and visual aids.

People want to **serve**. Volunteerism is a calling for many, and people are trying to get a handle on how being Christ's disciples plays out in acts of kindness. Whether it's a nursing home ministry, homeless shelter, a twelve-step group, a food pantry, ESL, conducting a church audit or going on a short-term missions trip, people need to contribute their time and talent for the Kingdom.

People desperately want **hope** in a troubled, broken world that often appears on the brink of dystopian oblivion. Whether the concern is global warming, the threat of epidemic disease, or nuclear holocaust, people are gravely concerned. Church helps people trust the future to the One who holds tomorrow in His hand, the One who will one day right every wrong. As Eugene Peterson puts it, we're in a story written by God, and can trust the Author of our faith as we turn the next page.

People want **certainty** in a relativistic, changing world that rests on arbitrary preferences. People want to know that there are moral absolutes, and that we *can* know right from wrong. They're looking for a moral base, a firm foundation, a definitive word from Above. There are churches that will affirm nearly any behavior. People come to church wanting to know where the boundary lines are and how they ought to live.

Do people come to church for **wrong reasons**? Of course they do. Some are seeking respectability, business networking opportunities, a spouse, or a place that will perform a wedding, baptize their children, or provide a funeral. They may find the music and preaching inspiring, and want to catch a "good feeling". Some come hoping to gain God's favor. In the course of attending for such reasons we can only hope the Holy Spirit will speak to them and help them see that there's more to church than some of the above "fringe benefits". Regardless of why people attend, all are welcome; we take them as they are.

Tube Church

I invited a couple to church and was told, “Our *church* is watching the popular TV preachers.” I thought about this, and wondered...

- Does the TV preacher ever visit this family at their home in person?
- When there’s an illness in the family, does he stop by the hospital and pray for them?
- Will he get on his private jet and fly cross-country to baptize their children?
- Later on, will he conduct classes and confirm their children?
- Will he participate in their kids’ high school Baccalaureate service?
- Will he attend graduation, birthday, retirement and anniversary parties at their home?
- Will he preside at weddings for them after conducting premarital counseling?
- Does the TV preacher ever call them on the phone just to see how they’re doing? Could they easily call him at his office or his home?
- If there’s a death in the family will the TV preacher conduct the funeral?
- How does this family receive Holy Communion? Will one of the deacons or elders of any of the TV ministries bring the Bread and Cup to them?
- Will the TV preacher invite them over to his office for coffee?
- Does the TV preacher ever stop by where they work to see them?
- Can they list their TV preacher as a referral for a character reference?
- When they don’t understand or agree with something they hear in a TV sermon, are they able to discuss this with the preacher?
- When they are facing a tough decision or transition in their lives, does the TV preacher meet with them and offer pastoral advice?
- Do they enjoy fellowship activities with the people of the TV preacher’s congregation?
- Can they use the Church Library of the TV preacher’s church to borrow devotional books and Bible study materials?

- If they're having problems with housing, healthcare, employment, transportation, etc., will the TV preacher get involved, offer assistance, and give some good local referrals?
- What kind of religious education are their children getting, since they don't go to Sunday School or Vacation Bible School?
- When they move into a new home, will the TV preacher come over and do a house blessing?
- Will the TV preacher give them opportunities to serve the Lord on a church board or teach a class or sing in his choir?
- If the TV preacher happened to be visiting their town and passed them on the sidewalk, would he greet them by name?
- Do they really worship, or merely "watch" church?

Most local churches can't attract the kinds of celebrities and musicians that flock to most TV ministries and mega-churches. Most pastors are not best-selling authors, but their churches can offer individuals a close, personal, caring relationship.

The only way TV preachers make a connection with people is by regularly asking them for money. A friend told me that a TV preacher sent him a letter appealing for money that began, "You are so dear to me." My friend laughed. "He doesn't even know me!" Jesus warned of preachers who "smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity... don't be impressed with charisma; look for character... a genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook" (Matthew 7, the Message).

TV preachers may say some very good things, but they are no substitute for the worship, instruction, fellowship, service, and outreach of a local church.

Perhaps the reason TV church is "enough" for some people is because it offers a no-commitment, "leave-me-alone" religion. TV and pod-cast preacher are far enough away to pose no threat to people, who may even *prefer* them "at a distance". They don't have to be concerned that the TV preacher might confront them with

something they'd rather not hear... because they can easily grab their remote and turn him off or change the channel.

On the other hand... A child was walking to church, and was asked why he walked so far. His answer: "Because people care about me there."

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Music

As an amateur musician, I've nearly always sung and played guitar in church, from the early days of Contemporary Christian Music. I took my guitar to war in Iraq to play at outdoor religious services. Christian music is awesome, but sadly, worship wars have been fought over music. The style of music is a major draw in bringing people into our churches. But are we providing entertainment or edification? Greg Peters observes: "Much of today's worship is motivated primarily by what is popular in secular entertainment—rock concert-like music and TED Talk-esque sermons. These may not be bad in and of themselves, but they are certainly not countercultural." When religious music becomes a performance, it attracts people wanting merely to be entertained. For instance, in Japan, African-American Gospel music is immensely popular, yet the country is less than 1% Christian.

I admit there are styles of Christian music I simply do not like. There are reasons people give to oppose modern musical styles. Here are some: "It is too new, often worldly, not like the established style, and we've gotten along fine without it." These critiques were leveled at hymn writer Isaac Watts, who wrote "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," "O God our Help in Ages Past," and "Joy to the World." The styles have changed; the arguments haven't.

Most churches need a variety of musical styles to accommodate the diverse traditions represented. While trying to please everyone, we will nearly always be displeasing some. I think of the old *Prairie Home Companion* radio show. Host

Garrison Keillor had nearly every kind of music imaginable on the show. Any given Saturday evening you were sure to hear music you loved, and possibly loathed.

While music deserves well-trained musicians, churches should resist the temptation to hire secular musicians. At one church I served, a member of our paid choir would make faces while I preached. If we believe that performing sacred music *is* worship, that it does not merely *accompany* worship, we will be careful to have only committed believers in our choirs and praise bands.

Larry Norman famously insisted, “*Why should the devil get all the best music?*” On one of his recordings was a directive to play it **loud**. I remember when B.J. Thomas switched to Christian music. He was providing entertainment for Christians but one rarely heard his new songs in church. The same may be said for Duke Ellington’s sacred concerts. I love jazz but it just doesn’t seem right for church.

At the risk of being called biased, I question styles that sound too secular. I attended a Catholic Mass where the soloist sounded like Tony Bennett, and I told the priest afterwards that the music seemed more appropriate for a nightclub. At a Protestant church I visited the pianist seemed to be channeling Jerry Lee Lewis. In all fairness, my performance style is like Dan Fogelberg, Tim Hardin and Tom Paxton, folk-singers. In church I sing a lot of Michael Card and John Michael Talbot’s music. When using a decidedly secular style, can we somehow make it reverent and worshipful? That’s a challenging, open-ended question.

I wish I could get technical, but I know little about sound mixers and related tools; I wish I could talk music theory, but I play by ear as a self-trained guitarist, banjo and harmonica player. Nonetheless I have some opinions on sacred music. Here is a sermon I gave on the subject, after reading Psalm 150:

Atheists have a shared belief--that this world is the product of random, chance, accidental, impersonal, evolutionary means. Some Christians accept theistic

evolution; atheists believe in non-theistic evolution. To them, the world “just happened.” Yet there is one factor that nags at some atheists because it seems to contradict their worldview. That factor is MUSIC, a factor evolution cannot explain.

Psalm 150 celebrates music because it is a gift from God, the Master Musician, who (some believe) sang the world into being.

Brian MacLaren notes that, “Even the convinced atheist—if he is the slightest bit reflective—has his doubts about atheism, whether they occur in a foxhole, hospice lobby, concert hall, delivery room, board meeting, or wilderness hike.” I’d like us to briefly consider four atheists and their response to music in particular...

Oliver Sachs is a neurologist who has written several popular books on the unusual things the human brain can do. In his book *Musicophilia* he describes such things as perfect pitch and tone deafness, musical savants, brain-worms (why some music sticks in our heads), musical dreams and other oddities. He shares some fascinating stories, like the man who was struck by lightning and became obsessed with the music of Chopin.

Sachs claims that he is a “Jewish atheist” which seems like an oxymoron. He sees his Judaism as ethnicity, I suppose. How would he respond if someone said they were a “Christian atheist”? At any rate, Sachs admits the dilemma music poses to atheists. The ability to perform and enjoy music serves no evolutionary purpose, no biological benefit. As far as cause-and-effect is concerned, music is a useless commodity. It shouldn’t exist, yet it does. There is no music center in the brain, yet we are drawn to music in a mysterious, inexplicable way. Music is a fascinating subject to a scientific mind like Sachs, but it interferes with his naturalist view of life.

Charles Darwin had no place in his worldview for music. He was so busy trying to understand the biological structure of things that he became blind and deaf to beauty. He admitted, “My mind seems to have become a sort of machine for

grinding general laws out of large collections of facts. The loss of aesthetic tastes is a lamentable loss of happiness.” Darwin was not moved by music; it did nothing for him, because it did not fit into his rational, ordered life. In fact, music opposed his theory. Darwin understood that people drew pleasure from music, but he could find no evolutionary purpose for it. He could not explain why music existed. The very fact that music exists without connection to natural selection indicates that music must have some other origin. Music remains a thorny question for people like Darwin.

Sigmund Freud lived in Vienna, the musical epicenter of Europe, where Mozart and Strauss wrote many of their masterpieces. Their artistry was lost on him. Freud saw music as more than a waste of time; it was a threat. The opera house and symphony hall were as much a threat to him as the church. Freud despised music. When coerced into attending a concert, he used the time to ponder the problems of his patients and theories. Freud was not indifferent to music; “resistance” is closer to describing his negative response; resistance to the power of music.

There is a reason why Sachs, Darwin, and Freud saw music as puzzling and threatening. The creativity of music points to a Creator. Music appears to be a gift from God. It is, in itself, proof that there is a God. Human creativity is a reflection of God’s. Therefore, music threatens the worldview of atheists. It interferes with their speculative philosophies. And so they resist the emotional draw of music, looking instead for rational, humanistic reasons for this phenomenon. All the while, music beautifully opposes their view of life without God.

Do all atheists resist music? No, and there have been atheist composers and performers. John Lennon wrote a hymn to secular humanism: *“Imagine there’s no Heaven, it’s easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky...and no religion too.”* Comedian Steve Martin wrote a hilarious bluegrass song that says “Atheists have no songs.” Well, they have one.

Stacy Horn is another non-believer who wrote an engaging memoir about choral singing titled *Imperfect Harmony*. She insists that she is an atheist, yet she finds purpose and beauty in life singing the masterpieces of sacred music. She readily admits that she does not believe what she is singing. Choral singing merely brings quality to her transient life till the day she ceases to exist. Her life is a contradiction. She rejects the concept of a Creator, while embracing proof of His being. She also seems obsessed with death, a prospect she is quite sure offers no future hope. She belongs to the professional choir of a cathedral, and is inundated with beautiful sacred space and glorious melody, yet remains stuck in unbelief.

Try to convince musicians who can't read music that music isn't a divine gift... people like Luciano Pavarotti, Dave Brubeck, Paul McCartney, and Bob Dylan. My own musical ability remains a mystery to me, one that can only be explained in terms of being blessed.

Boston College professor Peter Kreeft states: "I know three intelligent, sensitive souls who were saved from atheism and despair by the music of Bach. No one can tell me music is mere aesthetic pleasure, bloom or ornament. It is a lifeline, a prophet, a divine haunting. If there is a Bach, there is a God."

Music is the only art of earth we take to Heaven. There, we learn from the prophet Zephaniah, that God "rejoices over us with singing."

The story is told of a clever atheist who came to a village square and began badgering people with arguments and reasoning that there was no God, that such belief was folly. In the midst of his rant a child picked up a wooden flute and began to play. The villagers began to dance for joy, and laugh with pleasure, and the atheist walked away, dejected. Music was proof enough to dispel unbelief because it is a reflection of the Master Musician, who has put a song in our hearts. Amen.

Blessing of the Choir Robes

The Apostle Paul asserts that all things must be appraised by the criteria he gives in Philippians 4:8: “Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy—think on such things.” Music has the ability to express truth and reflect God’s glory. We grow by what we bring into our lives. Music that enriches us causes us to mature spiritually and brings us into closer communion with our Lord.

Music has three basic elements: melody, harmony, and rhythm. The inherent structure reveals the triumph of Creation over chaos, order over disorder, sanity over confusion, beauty over ugliness. Indiscriminate banging on a keyboard creates noise. It is only when the notes fit together that we achieve something of beauty.

Choral praise helps us experience the divine. Sacred music does not merely accompany worship; it is worship, and the singing of the choir is as important as any other aspect of what takes place in this sanctuary. Let us pray...

“O Lord, Who sung Creation into being—we extol the gift of music, which comes from Above. We ask Your blessing on our new choir robes and on those who faithfully sing Your praises in worship. May they be more than technically proficient; may they sing from hearts filled with praise... for Your glory and for the refreshing of our souls. May their singing transport us to a deep level of harmony with You. Sing through our choir and through us. Be glorified as we make music in our hearts to You, our Master Musician--Amen.”

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Working as a team

It is said of missionary work that the most stress does not come from culture shock, language limitations, lack of resources, local hostility or indifference, but from fellow missionaries. The same is often true in a parish. Associate Pastors and Senior Pastors

don't always get along. The Administrator may question pastoral decisions. The Youth Leader may be difficult to manage. Board chairs can cause problems.

When working for a Senior Pastor, the key to harmony is finding out what the boss wants and doing it. This doesn't mean unquestioning loyalty; most leaders want respectful input, even cordial disagreement. But there comes a limit. Be careful. When people say, "With all due respect..." what usually follows is *not* respectful.

How does one **communicate**? If you're the Associate Pastor, find out how the Senior Pastor wants to get information. Some may be quirky; I had a boss who wanted everything on a 3 x 5 index card. I had another who wanted a quick, bottom-line briefing, not a long explanation. I had another who wanted tons of detail.

Loyalty ideally is a two-way street. Unfortunately it doesn't always work that way. Most workers have stories of how they were expected to give all to their company, only to get very little in return. They felt used. Not all supervisors want to be mentors. Knowledge is power, and some don't want to share. Senior pastors may feel threatened by bright junior pastors. As a result, they may either be under-utilized or over-burdened, even forced out.

At an annual performance review I was asked what I *didn't like* about my job as pastor. Without hesitation I answered, **meetings**. They are a necessary evil. We need to have them, but they sure do take up a lot of time. Pastors usually attend most board meetings, and then have regular office staff meetings. There's a Church Council at which representatives from every board and special ministry are present. I do not recommend the elimination of meetings, but try to handle matters apart from meetings. Get as much done by emails, phone calls, text messages, and some face-to-face interaction.

A minister I was having coffee with told me he needed to get to a Trustees meeting that night "or all hell will break loose." I shared this with the Chairman of my

Trustees. I related how I then told this nervous pastor how I could miss *any* church meeting, confident that nothing would go wrong because I *trust* my people. The Chairman said to me with a smile, “Well, we **are** Trustees.” When trust erodes it is difficult to have a viable team.

At a Brigade staff meeting our Commander went around the table chewing us out for not talking to each other. He stated bluntly, “Over-coordinate.” He then started to apologize and we said, “No sir, we deserved that.” One thing I observed in parish work is that church boards are just as guilty. The Trustees don’t talk to the Deacons, even when there is significant overlap in their goals. Pastors need to encourage boards and staff to over-coordinate. Also be willing to hear some unpopular opinions at meetings. Nobody is thinking if everyone is thinking alike.

As to the actual running of meetings, ground rules need to be set. Have a written agenda. Some will want to use Robert’s Rules of Order, while others may adopt an adapted format. Some meetings are informal, relying on consensus; others vote on nearly everything. Some people will want to talk too much; kindly encourage them to be succinct. *Bottom line:* Do what works for you. If/when it stops working, try something else.

Have someone keep minutes, so there’s a record of the decisions made. Set a time limit. Some meetings go on forever. At one marathon meeting I finally announced, “Have a great rest of the meeting, but I need to go home.” I don’t advise that, but I had reached the limits of my endurance. When there’s too much on the agenda do some triage and decide what matters can wait for another day.

When should you have meetings? Some churches hold them after Sunday fellowship time, while others have evening meetings. Be flexible enough to go with what the group prefers.

You will probably need a church staff meeting weekly or at least monthly. You don't need training on small group dynamics to run a meeting. Be cordial, intentional, don't waste people's time, and move the agenda along. Open with prayer, and then get working.

As one who has supervised other ministers, my rules were simple: Keep me informed. I don't like surprises. Come to me if you have a problem. I can be both your boss and your pastor. We're in this together. If we can work in harmony, we'll have a healthy team.

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Accountability

It is dangerous to be on one's own with no accountability. Many pastors answer to no one. When they're out of line, there is no one to confront them and get them back in line. They're their own authority, with entirely too much power. In extreme cases they can take on the personae of cult leaders or dictators. At a Baptist seminary professors warned students not to become "Baptist Popes."

We all know of clergy who have had to step down due to moral failure. My denomination defines moral failure as "Any sin that brings particular disgrace upon the church, especially when the leadership of the church is involved." Leaders are expected to live above reproach, maintaining a good reputation and moral character... but no one is exempt from temptation. While we all sin, certain transgressions may necessitate disciplinary action. In the military we warn chaplains to Beware of Sam: Sex, Alcohol, and Money. There is also the abuse of authority, doctrinal heresy, sloth, plagiarism, hostility, and marital discord.

Who do pastors answer to? Ultimately we answer to God... but God expects us to look out for one another, to keep one another in check. This means caring enough to confront. We're not on our own, although some might like to walk their own way,

answering only to self. When we journey alone, we're walking a dangerous path, full of pitfalls. Solomon cautions in Ecclesiastes: "Two are better than one...if one falls down, his friend can reach out and help him up. But people who are alone, when they fall are in real trouble" (4:9-10). He also warns, "Enjoy every minute of your youth; take it all in, but remember that you must give an *account* to God for everything you do" (11:9).

Pastors shepherd congregations, offering guidance and admonition, but who shepherds the shepherds? An informal system of peer support, along with official supervisory oversight, is necessary. Every pastor needs a pastor; self-care isn't enough. A pastor who has himself as a pastor has a *fool* for a pastor. Ministers who hold things in and don't talk to other clergy are candidates for burnout. This is what hierarchical structures are for; they provide a chain of supervision and support.

Overseers within a denominational hierarchy usually do not micro-manage pastors, but they do check to see that they are remaining faithful to their calling, maintaining standards of conduct, and that their churches are healthy.

We need guidance, yet we also avoid it, because we confuse spiritual direction with coercive control. The persons we partner with do not run our lives. Accountability partners are enablers, coaches, not dictators. The relationship is casual and supportive. Their focus is encouragement. When we are shepherding someone, we serve as guides, examples, and sounding boards, not spiritual drill sergeants. We may be in positions of authority, but we don't act authoritarian. We're promoting progress, not perfection.

The Book of Hebrews urges us to "encourage and warn each other" with the understanding that "no discipline is enjoyable while it is happening; it is painful; but afterwards there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way" (10:25, 12:11). The goal of a critique is to assist the one being corrected, and if done properly, it will be appreciated.

What sort of issues should an accountability partnership include?

- Progress in personal Bible study and prayer
- Home life
- Physical exercise, diet, rest, and recreation
- Dealing with stress
- Managing temptations (thought life)
- Financial responsibility
- Parish pressures
- Professional development
- Compromising situations and moral dilemmas
- Parenting
- Hopes, dreams, and aspirations

Accountability sessions are also occasions to **vent** personal frustrations, which can be therapeutic. I've had chaplains I've supervised confide to me things that were troubling them, and then when they were finished, they thanked me for listening, saying that having an opportunity to express their concerns was helpful.

Accountability implies **confession and repentance**. James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." One of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous states (#5): "We've admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." Confession is a *spiritual discipline*. It is a way in which we connect to God in a healing manner, opening up to all sorts of possibilities of insight and renewal. Without confession, we remain stuck in our sins and hang-ups and prejudices. A heartfelt confession involves taking responsibility for our actions. We don't try to downplay our behavior. We offer no excuses. We feel true remorse. We place ourselves in God's merciful hands. Then after we confess, we accept God's forgiveness. We live as forgiven people. C.S. Lewis noted, "A Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is

enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble, because Christ is actually operating in and through him.” Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says that “Repentance is an attitude toward the past and a resolve for the future.”

We are accountable for all we do and say. Jesus warns, “You must give an account on the day of judgment for every idle word you speak” (Mt 12:36). Paul writes similarly, “Each of us will have to give a personal account to God” (Rom 14:12). The thought of standing before God some day is sobering.

What course of action do we take when a Christian leader falls? There needs to be a plan of action, to include the following: confrontation, confession, godly sorrow, repentance, accepting responsibility for one’s actions, reconciliation, direction and treatment under the supervision of an accountability group, a time of healing, then (hopefully) restoration. We should not automatically treat a fallen leader as “damaged goods.” We serve the God of the Second Chance.

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Parsonage living

I believe pastors need to live in the towns they are serving. When I was an Army Chaplain, I lived in on-post housing. It would have been more comfortable to rent a house off-base, but I felt compelled to share the experience of my fellow-soldiers and to be accessible. Some of my enlisted Chaplain Assistants lived off-base in better housing. Ministry of presence means living among the people you're serving.

Many churches offer a parsonage for their pastor. It is usually near the church. I lived in one that was nearly an appendage of the church. Surprisingly, the congregation rarely knocked on my door; they respected my need for a life apart from my job. That may not always be the case. I’m told that some congregants feel this is the church’s house so they should feel free to stop by anytime. That kind of

ownership attitude thankfully wasn't my experience the two times I lived in a parsonage.

Many ministers prefer a housing allowance so they can purchase a house of their own and build equity. My Brigade Commander told me just prior to my military retirement that his father-in-law was a Presbyterian minister who had always lived in a parsonage. When he finally retired, he had no place to go, and ended up renting an apartment. He advised me to buy a home. After living in a parsonage for two years, I did just that, I found a nice home in town. I explained my need to the church. After a lifetime of living in government quarters I wanted my own place. They were pleased; this meant I intended to stay put. I bought the place, a quarter of a mile from the church and my congregation was good enough to give me a monthly housing allowance that helped me to eventually pay off my mortgage. This obviously was not part of my contract. They sold the parsonage and invested the money in mutual funds. By the time I retired 15 years later, I owned my home, and the church had enough money saved to easily purchase another parsonage for the next pastor.

An advantage of living in a parsonage is that you're taken care of. If anything goes wrong, the church Trustees will fix it. But people will want to be invited over. Many pastors hold Bible studies and other small groups in their parsonages, or have an open house reception on special occasions like New Year's. Pastors ought to at least be saving for an eventual home of their own. If you are a homeowner of a place in another state and hope to return to it some day, consider renting it out and living in a parsonage. That might well prove to be a win-win situation.

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The Pastor's Devotional Life

It is very easy for pastors to excuse themselves from daily Bible reading because they are so immersed in the texts they are preaching and teaching from. But having a

daily quiet time is a means of self-preservation. It is a matter of discipline, but not a matter of performance. The length, depth, or consistency of our quiet time is not to gain favor with God; it is not a means of His approval or blessing. It is a way of getting our day focused. It reminds us of eternal principles while we struggle in the messiness of our broken world.

At my monthly clergy roundtable at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, we went around the table sharing what we did in our personal devotional time, what works for us. One of our group made this observation:

“Are we close to God because we have this comforting devotional activity or because we love God? We can become selfish in our spirituality. We should have a daily devotional time for God and not for what we get out of it. This is His time. We need to stay dependent on God, not on our devotional habits.” While I agree, I also believe my quiet time is good for me.

We all have our own notions regarding the mystery of prayer. The real issue is “what does prayer accomplish?” Does it change God’s plan, or does it change the one praying? In our quiet time do we pray to try to force God’s hand or win God’s favor? What *are* the “rewards” for reading Scripture and having a devoted quiet-time? Is it a burden or a blessing? Are we having quiet time out of a sense of obligation, to meet our daily minimum requirements, or because we’re happy to spend some privileged quality-time before God? The inherent rewards of quiet time are nourishing our souls and enriching our relationship with God.

The key to private devotions is to find what works; one size doesn’t fit all. Don’t listen to people who say you need to pray harder or longer. That’s legalism. You know what you need. Maybe slowly, carefully reading one chapter of Scripture a day is better than slogging through five or more chapters in order to read the Bible in a year. A healthy devotional time might include, in addition to Scripture, a time of silence, a page of a devotional book and a prayer book (especially when you’re at a

loss for words, or to “prime the pump”). You may want to include the Lord’s Prayer. And sing—a devotional song, and/or the *Gloria Patri*.

When things don’t work out and you are unable to have your devotions, resist feeling guilty. God understands.

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Pastoral Counseling

When life hurts, people often discuss their issues with a pastor. Talking is therapeutic. Getting things “off your chest” helps. It provides an opportunity to name what's bothering them to another person, one who cares. Pastors find in the course of counseling an opportunity to help people see how God can play a part in their problems, that help is available from a Higher Source. There is a spiritual dimension to every concern.

In most states, clergy counseling is legally confidential. When people enter the minister's office they are protected by “privileged communication”, which means the only One the pastor will talk to about them is the Lord. In most states, an exception for confidentiality is made for the physical or sexual abuse of children, in which case clergy are required to report abuse to law enforcement.

Individuals coming for counseling often are not fully sure what they’re looking for. They come because they are hurting in some way, and probably have been for some while. It is not easy to ask for help (especially for men). The first contact may be indirect, disguised. They may be reluctant to seek advice because of resistance to change. They may even be used to their dysfunction as their new normal. The first session with counselors may be to “check them out.” They may tell you their concern about a “friend.”

I wish I had a magic wand. We can't "fix" every problem. We can't even explain why life hurts. We can suggest new ways to perceive and respond to life's woes, but moreover we can be companions to people who are suffering.

Psychiatrists may effectively treat mental disorders but they lack the personal, relational, priestly role pastors enjoy, and the unhurried ministry of presence that conveys healing and wholeness and purpose. A psychiatrist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center told me he wished he could do what a priest does, namely assure troubled people that their crippling guilt is pardoned.

People need to know that it is not necessary to have a major crisis to see their minister, and encouraged to not wait till things get worse. Sometimes it is helpful and encouraging to simply sit down over a cup of coffee and talk over how things are. A chat with one's pastor can help to reduce the day-to-day stress of life. Some may stop by for a quick prayer or some brief coaching, mentoring from their pastor.

People often seek out their minister for help in the following areas:

Spiritual Direction	Substance Abuse
Questions and Doubts	Suicide Prevention
Pre-marital Preparation	Health Concerns
Marital Stress	Healing for Relationships
Career Guidance	Church Conflict
Parenting Advice	Discipleship
Ethical Dilemmas	Communication
Assurance of Salvation	Sexual Harassment
Emotional Distress/Depression	Domestic Violence
Grief/Bereavement	Crisis Intervention
Job Stress	

Since pastors can't have expertise in all areas, they provide helpful referrals. Most have compiled a listing of social service agencies and ministries which can augment the pastoral care they provide. If they are unable to fully assist a parishioner, they can point people to others who can. And when they know the hurts of their parish, they are more able to intelligently intercede in prayer.

Frankly, I did much more counseling as an Army chaplain than as a civilian Pastor, and in more serious areas. The military promotes the “chain-of-concern” which keeps chaplains busy. Nonetheless, civilian pastors can find themselves fairly busy helping people in need.

What kind of counseling is best? Most pastors find a variety of methods that work for them. They study various approaches; they don't get locked into one. I saw a film of Carl Rogers counseling a woman, and he gave her direct advice. Even Rogers wasn't totally Rogerian. My favored approach is William Glaser's Reality Therapy which says that everyone has legitimate needs but often we get those needs met with irresponsible and often self destructive behaviors.

Questions to ask in Counseling...

- What do you hope will happen by your coming here?
- Who has the problem, and how often does it occur?
- What are your needs?
- Are you seeking to disengage or fight?
- If I were to ask your supervisor/spouse what the problem is, what do you think he/she might say?
- What have you done to resolve your problem?
- What would you have done differently?
- What do you think you need to change?
- Is there something you want to tell me?

- What would happen if things got better...or worse?
- What are you most afraid of?
- How do others perceive you?
- Are there other life events influencing your distress?

I have found it helpful to prepare fact-sheets to reinforce counseling. I have ones on anger, depression, marriage, divorce, parenting, end-of-life matters, grief, illness, birth order, insomnia, PTSD and suicide prevention. If you are in seminary, I need to inform you that not a lot of people come for pastoral counseling with spiritual concerns or struggles over theological issues. But every problem has a spiritual dimension.

To assist people in pain you may wish to establish support groups. Churches often have groups to help people deal with substance abuse, grief, divorce recovery, and many other issues. Some people may feel dependent on you, and you may need to tactfully wean them off of your support.

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Pastoral Authority

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who must give an account,” Hebrews 13:17. Authority is power rightfully held. The clergy is an institution occupied with matters of eternal significance, potentially wielding tremendous influence in society. In order for clergy to effectively minister they need to appeal to their God-given authority. Christ has chosen and commissioned finite human instruments to carry on and embody His ministry, sharing His authority. One of the key components of pastoral ministry is leadership...and leaders need to lead, to take charge as persons of authority yet under authority.

With authority comes responsibility. Clergy need to determine how to handle their power. Some are manipulators who abuse their authority. Influence is not for self-aggrandizement but to benefit the Kingdom of God. Authority is for God's glory, not our's. Eugene Peterson cautions, "If we are exercising authority all the time, when do we have a chance to practice obedience?" (*Working the Angles*, 115)

The church identifies, examines, and commissions individuals to be set apart for service. They are authorized and appointed as spiritual overseers to encourage, admonish, instruct, and counsel believers. When they speak, people listen.

New ministers soon find out that there are people in their churches who would do nearly anything for them...and others from whom they would have trouble getting the time of day. The variable that determines the receptivity of support is the level of authority one is allowed. The *perception* of authority largely determines one's influence. Charismatic leaders gain some support by virtue of their strong personalities, and highly educated clergy can gain respect due to their vast learning; but no amount of charisma or academic credentials will convince people who reject pastoral authority. Pastors have no problem being prophetic when people accept their authority and welcome admonition.

Authority is supported by one's title. In the Army Chaplaincy, this includes rank. When I retired from the military, my church asked what I wished to be called. It dawned on me that "chaplain" wouldn't do. So I said, "Your Eminence is good!" Fortunately they got my sense of humor. Clergy have lots of options: Reverend, Doctor, Rector, Preacher, Father... but Pastor seems the friendliest, and it covers the diverse work we do. In Tennessee people called me Preacher which addressed only one aspect of my work. Some titles seem too professionally stuffy, like Reverend and Doctor. If you have a doctorate, your church should know it, but I recommend you don't go by the title. So what about just your first name? This is becoming increasingly popular, and I'm glad people feel comfortable enough to do this, but I

wonder if it undermines our authority? I prefer “Pastor Bob.” This is more affectionate than authoritarian.

Authority grows with demonstrated competence. When pastors prove to be trusted expositors of the Scriptures, competent in counseling, and demonstrate loving compassion, their perceived authority increases. Authority is diminished when truth communicated from the pulpit is not evidenced by the minister’s life. Trust is often fragile and easily broken. Because of high expectations, some pastors are afraid to relax and show their true selves. Perhaps not too much; I know a few pastors who seem to have been born without a filter. For the most part, by being genuine, with no façade, pastors are better able to connect to others and gain their confidence. They model pilgrimage, not perfection. “I am what I am by the grace of God,” I Corinthians 15:10.

People tend to judge by appearance. Some clergy wear a clerical collar, while others dress casually. Some preach from an elevated pulpit in a robe and stole surrounded by stained glass, while others wear a shirt with no tie and in an unadorned church and walk into the congregation for an intimate conversation. In the military, chaplains serious about their unique ministry (and who want to be taken seriously) will have spit-shined boots, polished brass, and the soldierly bearing of an officer and a gentleman. They earn respect. At the start of a Brigade staff meeting the Commander turned to me and said, “I’m glad you’re here, chaplain; you’re here to keep us honest.” Chaplains officially are advisors to Commanders. My position (perceived as an integral part of the unit), rank, and reputation influenced the Commander’s attitude.

People view clergy through the lens of their personal experience, both positive and negative, and by the largely negative images portrayed the media, in movies and television. As a result, our credibility and trust has suffered. We thankfully fare better than lawyers and politicians. When high-profile clergy fall morally it makes us

all look bad. For years I fought the image of bumbling, ineffective Fr Mulcahey on MASH. Because of the Catholic Priest scandal some Priests won't wear their collar except on official business; they feel like targets of derision. It needs to be pointed out that when clergy act contrary to the teachings of their religion, we should blame *them*, not their religion, and not others who wear the collar. An Army Corps of Engineers major was introduced to me and said with an edge to his voice, "Oh, you're a chaplain? I can tell you about some chaplains I've known." I answered, "Yes sir, and when you're done I can tell you about some Engineers I've known." He got the point. We need to take people as they are, as we meet them, and try not to pre-judge based on what others may have done.

In the exercise of authority, we have more power and influence than we may realize. We often enjoy deferential treatment, respect, access to busy people, and we're accustomed to having our voice heard. As such, we need to avoid being coercive manipulators or dictators. It's hard to be humble when you're given authority. We can become enamored of our expertise and fail to listen to our parish councils.

Those in authority need an ample dose of humility. Occasionally when conducting a Bible study, someone will make an observation and I'll say, "Give me a minute to write that down." I'm acknowledging that others have spiritual insight; it doesn't come exclusively to the ordained. Humility is elusive; when you think you have it, you've lost it! Humility is honestly assessing ourselves in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness. Humility is not pretending to be other than we are, but acknowledging the truth about what we are. Humility is self-forgetfulness. It is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

Who are we to presume to seek this high office? In the exercise of pastoral authority pastors need to affirm ourselves as God-sent messengers, experts in religion while affirming others as capable of attaining spiritual knowledge. We are professionals. But no one is indispensable. We are always interim pastors. We can be replaced. But

while we shepherd God's flock, we do so confidently, armed with divine authority to proclaim God's truth to His people. It is not we who minister, but Christ (and His authority) in us.

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Politics in the Pulpit

A gentleman showed up at my church one Sunday, and afterwards approached me. He explained how he had been attending another church in town, and their new minister's sermons were all about political hot-topics. This bothered him and he was seeking a church that proclaimed the Gospel. As for the church he left, it doesn't matter what kind of politics was being expressed from the pulpit, right or left. What mattered was that this minister felt he needed to address the politically charged issues of the day. Some pastors weaponize God to promote their political views. Here's my view: We get politics shoved down our throats six days a week. Isn't it a relief to come to church and hear from God's word?

I am not suggesting that ministers *never* be political, but we need to be careful. Political content is creeping into our pulpits far too much these days. Some churches invite candidates to speak at their churches. This is inappropriate and tantamount to endorsement. The most political I have ever been as a pastor was in honoring "Sanctity of Human Life Sunday" and preaching on racial reconciliation. When an election was looming, the most I would say is: "Know the issues, know the candidates, pray, then get out and vote." The unstated message is: "It is not my place to tell you how to vote."

As an evangelical, it appears I am in the minority. According to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, most evangelicals say congregations *should* discuss social and political issues, including candidate endorsements. Nearly every other major religious group in the U.S. wants religious leaders to keep quiet on politics. I question that a bit;

here in New England, liberal clergy seem just as apt to preach politics. The survey also says that most churchgoers do not know whether their minister is Protestant or Democrat, which I find a good thing. I save my political views for close friends in Starbucks.

On the other hand, there may be times when being political is appropriate. Abraham Lincoln warned, “To sin by silence when they should protest, makes cowards of men.” A word of caution: don’t be a prophet if you care about your safety or popularity. We have the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who openly opposed Hitler and became a martyr. Hitler seduced a nation as a false messiah. In their yearning for restoration, the Germans summoned the devil himself. Hitler’s ultimate goal was to abolish the Christian church, replace the Bible with *Mein Kampf*, replace the cross with the swastika, and return Germany to its pre-Christian tribal paganism. The SS was a religious cult, complete with occult rituals. Two days after Hitler took power, Bonhoeffer spoke on the radio about the idolatry of granting any leader absolute power. For the sake of the Jews, Bonhoeffer became part of an unsuccessful plot to assassinate Hitler. He joined the Abwehr, the German intelligence service, but was in fact a double agent, working behind the scenes against the Nazi regime. He started an underground seminary. He helped smuggle Jews out of Germany and worked as a courier for the German Resistance movement. Bonhoeffer knew that he could well die for his opposition to Hitler. He wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” Bonhoeffer was arrested and sent to Buchenwald then finally to Flossenbürg, a death camp where he was executed three weeks before Hitler’s suicide, by the Führer’s direct order. A fellow-prisoner wrote, “I have never seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.” Very few would suggest that Bonhoeffer acted in an unbiblical manner.

Henry Ward Beecher, pastor of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn NY, was regarded as the most famous man in America. His sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Lincoln, upon meeting her said, “So you’re the lady who started this Great

War.” The two siblings made a major impact against slavery. Henry would hold mock slave auctions in his church to highlight the horrors of human trafficking, and raised money to free slaves. He unsparingly described the lives of slaves, telling in chilling detail of physical and sexual abuse, and crushing labor. He welcomed the Civil War as a chance to abolish slavery. He traveled to England to convince the British not to side with the South. He was instrumental in the founding of the Republican Party and actively campaigned for its first two presidential candidates, John Frémont and Abraham Lincoln. He became a national figure with enormous influence.

Jesus was not political; He did not oppose Caesar. He told Pilate that His Kingdom was apolitical, “not of this world.” Nonetheless, it appears right to stand for human rights and religious freedom. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared, “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state but rather the conscience of the state.” Religion has spearheaded prison reform, education, human rights, addiction treatment, and social services for the poor and homeless.

Some Americans think the idea of the separation of church and state is settled law and many regard it as freedom from religion, a means to deny religious people the right to express their faith. This principle has been wrongly understood as justifying the removal of God from public life. It is not law, but was merely suggested in an 1802 address by Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptists. Jefferson believed in the free exercise of religion. He declared: “The First Amendment has erected a wall of separation between church and state, but that wall is a one directional wall; it keeps the government from running the church, but it makes sure that Christian principles will always stay in government.” On a personal note, I had to live through a legal challenge to the constitutionality of the military chaplaincy, which took years to be resolved in the courts.

How ought clergy respond to leaders they dislike? I recall during my seminary days, one day at our chapel service a guest preacher said vile things about the current President, a man I did not vote for. His words were politically-charged, highly offensive, and his attitude was thoroughly unbiblical. Scripture admonishes us to honor, respect, and pray for our leaders in government. To my shame, I did not stand up and walk out.

In being prophetic—speaking truth to power—there are clergy who fall on their swords over trifles; they seem to be always looking for causes to oppose. They need to better pick their battles. Some ministers are so busy addressing political matters that they abandon their calling and go into politics. Until the Vatican came down on this, there were several U.S. Senators who were also priests. Among Protestants there are some prominent clergy who are activists but do not pastor congregations. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks admonishes, “The use of religion for political ends is not righteousness but idolatry.”

Deborah Tannen’s book *The Argument Culture* describes how Americans thrive on oppositional combativeness in the expression of viewpoints (and this was written before social media). We seem to relish seeing people from differing positions attack each other. It is sadly entertaining. Long gone are the days of polite, civil discourse on matters of political disagreement. Debate is no longer dialogical; it has become adversaria; not a “meeting of minds.” This lack of decorum has affected the church as well. We who are called to be peacemakers should be speaking the truth in love.

Politics is not limited to the pulpit; it is also found in the Fellowship Hall. I know of parishioners who have left churches because their political convictions were attacked and belittled over coffee after worship. There is no biblical mandate that we must think alike politically; the Body of Christ is diverse. We must respect differences and not rebuke or demonize those with differing political positions. Let’s *lighten up*. As a Hanukkah gag gift, I gave my closest friend, the President of our local synagogue, a

yarmulke with a political message on it. He told me, “I love it, but I sure won’t be wearing it at the synagogue!” He in turn gave me a Christmas gift, a baseball cap that said: “The Sermonator.”

In a church I served, two parishioners were running for office, on the local and state level. We all knew this, and to their credit, neither campaigned on Sunday mornings. They participated in worship but put their political aspirations on hold. I suspect most of the congregation supported them. It was encouraging to see them run for office and not take advantage of their church membership.

We should have well thought out political convictions, but the uncivil use of satire, ridicule and angry rhetoric to prove the other side wrong has no place in the Christian life, or in the pulpit.

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Social Justice

Some pastors are social justice activists. They advocate for civil rights, feminism, religious liberty, ecology, multiculturalism, immigration reform and the sanctity of human life. They are against racism, inequality, sex trafficking, domestic violence and war. They take their mandate from Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” John Piper points out that one can be a social justice hero, warrior, victim, or villain.

Churches advocate for the powerless by operating food pantries, 12-step groups, after-school programs, elder-care, crises pregnancy centers, homeless shelters, fuel assistance, refugee assistance, divorce-care, ESL (English as a Second Language) and parenting classes. They ensure their churches are handicap accessible. They visit prisoners and offer programs for area military in the area.

Concern for justice leads some to prophetic activism, speaking truth to power. They may be involved in protests, vigils, and campaigns to raise awareness. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said “In justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Fleming Rutledge writes, “Because justice is such a central part of God’s nature, He has declared enmity against every form of injustice.”

While often derided as “Social Gospel”, justice ministries show compassion on the less fortunate and extend a helping hand to alleviate their suffering. Proverbs 28:5 states, “Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely.” There are so many needs in this broken world, but the average church can only take on a few and work at being agents of healing.

We need to live out our faith. If we don’t, our faith is inauthentic. The Apostle James insists, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (1:27). We need a faith that works. The prophet Micah urges us “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8).

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Religious Education

There are five things a church must have, or it is not a church: worship, instruction, fellowship, service, and outreach. Religious education is vital to the growth of a congregation; it is how we make disciples. It often incorporates all five elements.

The first stage in the slow death of a church is when the Sunday School goes. There goes the future of the church, along with any hope of attracting families.

Having a Director of Religious Education is critical. This is the person who will be the “face” of RE, who will choose curricula, run Vacation Bible School, oversee small groups, publicize programs, recruit and train teachers.

Confirmation

Confirmation is not graduation! If students think it is, they've only confirmed their lack of commitment to Christ. Our Jewish friends face the same problem with Bar Mitzvahs. Confirmation is a time to ensure that our teens are doctrinally sound and biblically literate. It is also a time to confront them with their responsibility for making moral choices in life. Staying active with church shows that their faith-commitment is genuine and authentic. They, not their parents, are to blame if they fail to choose God's will and live wisely. Tell the class:

- Your parents gave you life but can't live it for you.
- They can take you to church, but they can't make you believe.
- They can admonish you about moral choices, but they can't make you holy.
- They can love you as God's gift, but they cannot place you in God's family.
- They can pray for you, but they cannot make you walk with God.
- They can teach you about Jesus, but they can't make Him your Lord.

Confirmed teens are morally accountable for their actions. Confirmation does not cover everything they need to know, but it provides a summary of the essential teachings of the Christian faith and stresses that our beliefs determine our behavior.

Confirmation Class Schedule:

Session One: Meeting with our Board of Deacons/Elders

Session Two: Jesus--the Rock and Focus of our lives

The promised Messiah, the God-Man (deity & humanity), His virgin birth, sinlessness, atoning sacrifice, resurrection and return.

Session Three: Salvation--new, abundant, and everlasting life

Faith, repentance, assurance and security; the 2 natures, the indwelling Spirit providing guidance and power.

Session Four: Truths that Transform

The sovereignty of God, revelation / the Scriptures, the Trinity, human depravity, justification by faith, sanctification, miracles, and the “end times”.

Session Five: The Church--a caring community

“Who’s Who”--deacons, trustees, pastor, religious education director, finance committee, growth groups, etc. Also the ordinances, the “church universal / Body of Christ”, worship, missions, instruction, fellowship, & service opportunities

Session Six: Our denomination, a legacy of faith & practice

Our heritage, denominational distinctives, and key figures in church history.

Session Seven: Christian Growth & Discipleship

Our “chief end” to glorify God, prayer, Bible study methods, choosing a translation, spiritual fruit & gifts, faith-sharing, liberty & legalism, commitment to Christ.

There ought to be a service of confirmation in the worship service, similar to the reception of new members. Normally those confirmed receive a study Bible.

Explaining Christ and Salvation to Young Children

Children can respond to the Good News but need it to be explained with simple language. They don’t understand the religious terminology adults use, and if their acceptance is based on a superficial grasp of doctrine, fear of punishment, desire for reward, peer pressure, or to please a parent or teacher, they may rightly later question their decision or may feel the need to receive Christ repeatedly.

Children need to understand 5 things:

- What sin is... choosing to do wrong
- Who Jesus is... God's Son, who loves us
- Grace... we don't have to earn/deserve His love
- Atonement... Jesus died to take our punishment
- Security... when we trust Jesus we become His children forever

God wants to forgive all who want forgiveness. He promises that all who believe in Jesus are part of God's family and will have everlasting life in Heaven. We need to explain that God loves us and wants us to be part of His family forever, which means when we die, we will go to be with God, and while we're alive, He helps us every day.

Object lessons are popular but young children think concretely and symbolism is often abstract to them. It is better to tell Bible stories and relate them to life. For example:

- Jesus talking with Nicodemus, John 3
- Jesus talking with the woman at the well, John 4
- Paul and Silas telling a jailer about Jesus, Acts 16

Ask children to tell in their own words what they think the stories mean. Ask if they understand why Jesus died, what a person needs to do to become a Christian, what it means to believe.

When quoting Scripture to children, use a modern translation appropriate for the age group, such as the NIV (New International Readers Version) or NLT (New Living Translation). Find out if the child has a modern language Bible, or preferably a Children's Study Bible, such as the NIV Adventure Bible for Young Readers. Be sure the children know what the Bible is—God's teaching for us.

A few good verses to use:

- I John 1:9, "If we tell our sins to God, he is faithful and true; He will forgive us and take our sins away."

- 1 Peter 3:18, “Jesus suffered and died for sins once and for all time. He did what is right died for those who don't do right. He died to bring you to God. His body was put to death. But the Holy Spirit brought him back to life.”
- Romans 3:23, “Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God's glory.”
- John 3:16, “God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not be lost, but have eternal life.”

-You may want to assign these as memory verses.

We become Christians by *asking* Jesus in prayer. Praying means telling Jesus that we're sorry for our sin and want His forgiveness.

How do we know if we're really God's children? The Bible promises that God will never let go of us, that He will always love us...

John 10:27-28, “My sheep listen to My voice. I know them, and they follow Me. I give them life that last forever, and they will never be punished. No one can steal them out of My hand.”

But salvation is more than a decision... it is a new life, a journey of living for Jesus.

Ask how being a child of God will make us different at home and school. What will happen when we do something wrong?

A prayer children can pray:

“Jesus, I know You love me so much You died on the cross for all the things I've done wrong. Please forgive me. Come into my heart; I want You to be my friend and teacher. Help me to follow and become like You. Thank You for making me part of Your family forever. Amen.”

CE Director Applicants Search Committee Interview Questions:

- What is your statement of faith (basic religious beliefs)?
- How do you see this position? What is your vision of this ministry?

- Do you envision making any changes to the curriculum, etc?
- How Biblically-based will be your focus?
- What would you regard as your strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you assess your people skills?
- Where do you see the development of the CE program with regard to short-term and long-term goals?
- How do you see your relationship with the CE Board Chairperson?
- How available will you be if in addition you hold a full-time job?
- Give your philosophy of teacher recruitment and training.
- Have you conducted any teacher training?
- How might you encourage parents who merely drop-off children and don't stay for worship?
- What is your previous experience with youth and youth ministry?
- How do you see the Sunday School program growing over the years (what is your vision for growth)?
- Offer your perspective on teen and adult education.
- How well do you respond to supervision?
- What experience do you have with regard to recruiting, delegating and supervising?
- How will you provide follow-up to absent students?
- Are you able to work as part of a ministry team?

Family-life religious education

Most churches offer marriage workshops, to include the following topics:

- Communication
- Commitment
- Compatibility
- Premarital Preparation
- True Love
- Forgiveness
- Problem Solving
- Managing Differences
- Expectations
- Personality Types
- Birth Order
- Handling Hostility
- Financial Responsibility
- Traits of Healthy Families
- Parenting

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Preaching

Preaching is important. It is often the principle way ministers are appraised. But in many Protestant churches, the “primacy of preaching” is over-emphasized. Some churches even refer to their Sunday service as a “Preaching Service.” Ministers appear eager to get the preliminaries over with in order to get on with the most important part of the service, the sermon, which nearly takes on the status of a sacrament.

As a pastor I am not a free man in the pulpit. I am not there to speak my own mind, but to honestly try to give every Biblical text its legitimate, just meaning, without

prejudice or partiality. My mission is to communicate the wisdom of God, and to do so I must be a servant of the Scriptures.

Some pulpits have reminders to those who preach. A minister told me about a time he was invited to be a guest preacher in a church. He walked up to the pulpit, looked out over the congregation, then down at the pulpit. There engraved were these words: *“We would see Jesus.”*

We need to understand our audience. In preaching, one size doesn’t fit all. We need to know their fears, stresses, worldview, education, culture, and their level of biblical understanding. As an Army Chaplain I had it relatively easy. My congregation shared the common experience of being soldiers. It was a unique subculture. Upon retirement I moved to a blue-collar town in Massachusetts, which had its own culture, one I needed to appreciate and address.

Preaching is one of the few practical areas of ministry most seminaries teach. As an experienced preacher, I’d like to share some principles of preaching:

- Find a preaching style you are comfortable with.
- Find your voice and learn to write in your voice. Be yourself.
- Read your sermon manuscript out loud before Sunday; you’ll feel more comfortable preaching, and you’ll find that sometimes what looks good on paper doesn’t sound right when spoken.
- Have a “hook” at the beginning—something catchy, to grab people’s attention... then try to refer back to it at the conclusion.
- Read both exegetical *and* devotional commentaries: the former to understand the text, the latter to know how to convey it to people.
- Always ask yourself the question: *“So what?”*
- Also ask, *“Where is the gospel in this?”* Spurgeon urged, *“Make a bee-line to the Cross.”*

- Others may preach the gospel better than you can, but no one can preach a better gospel.
- Avoid slang, jargon, and insider-vocabulary. Assume un-churched people are listening. Express theological matters without using academic terminology.
- Using notes: Some can preach without them, some with just an outline, and some prefer a full manuscript. Only you know what works best for you.
- If you use a manuscript, consider emailing it to your congregation Sunday afternoon to reinforce the message.
- Even if you use a screen, put your outline in the bulletin along with any charts, visuals, or follow-up questions. This will give people something to take home and ponder.
- In referring to the original Greek or Hebrew, keep it simple. Don't get too technical and don't try to impress.
- I like to do research and prepare a rough first draft on Mondays, then live with it the rest of the week, making changes as I meditate on what I've written. I keep a copy close-by, wordsmith the manuscript, and do additional research.
- Write down your own impressions before reading the commentaries.
- How long should a sermon be? To read aloud the Sermon on the Mount takes about 20 minutes.
- In preaching a sermon-series, chart out what you hope to cover and give the congregation an idea of what to expect.
- You are giving the only Biblical instruction many will get all week; make it substantive.
- Movement—some preachers move around a lot; others stay put. Do what is comfortable for you. If you remain at the pulpit, use an omni-directional microphone.
- Look around at the congregation while preaching without making direct eye-contact.
- Don't rehearse gestures; let them flow naturally or they'll look staged.

- Vocal variety is a must.
- Print out your text in large print; if a lay-person reads the text, provide a copy to them to make public reading easier, and go over with them the pronunciation of difficult names and places.
- Don't be afraid to use humor, so long as it fits the context. Humor can be an effective way of getting a point across and makes the preacher more personable...but remember, you're not an entertainer.
- I always consult my Quotations file when preparing sermons to inject some nuggets of wisdom. Often a good quote is what's most remembered (ask me if you'd like a copy).
- It's been said that pastors are to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." In your prophetic role, speak the truth in love, respectfully. Challenge but don't beat up your congregation; they mostly come to church that way already. Many need healing and encouragement.
- Recognize that God may use a sermon you're not happy with, and one you think is great may not go over well. You won't always get honest feedback, so in this life you won't know the full impact of any sermon you preach.
- Don't expect God to bless when you haven't made adequate preparation.
- Be a reader. I'm amazed how things from books I've read (apart from commentaries) make it into my sermons. Reading makes you a better writer. Read fiction (especially the classics) as well as professional books.
- In introducing quotations, unless the person is well-known, saying, "It's been said..." is enough.
- Some say it is important to have a "*big idea*". It is helpful to be able to summarize your message in a few concise words, a thesis statement.
- Don't choose too big a passage; take a paragraph from Scripture and keep your focus narrow.

- In expository sermons don't spend too much time quoting from other passages; don't jump all over the place. Stick to explaining the text you've chosen.
- Illustrations should be brief. Some preachers make too much of them, even building sermons around them. Use illustrations from your personal experience but don't talk about yourself too much.
- When I share an illustration about someone I've known, it is always from a previous assignment, and I'm clear about that. Never talk about people in your present position; it puts people ill at ease.
- Never talk about your family members without their permission.
- Don't answer questions no one has asked.
- Remind your listeners that you're preaching to yourself also. I occasionally say, "I'm not sure if you need to hear this sermon but I know I need to hear it!"
- Occasionally video yourself preaching. You may see things you're unaware of that need correction.
- Don't rock! Some preachers rock sideways, forward and backward, which is very distracting.
- Emotions: Have some, but don't over-do it. I've gotten choked-up occasionally, which is OK, but not all the time. Don't be an angry preacher, mad-at-the-world, yet don't smile when talking about serious matters.
- Keep a log of all the sermons you've preached, the date and text.
- The Bible is powerful. Expect it to transform hearts...beginning with yours.

Sermon Series

A sermon series can give a congregation a sense of direction, as opposed to the often miscellaneous messages that follow no discernable pattern. Even the Lectionary, while thorough, does not provide a beginning and ending. Though the pulpit is not a classroom, a series of messages gives an elective feel in that when finished, the

church has a sense of completion. Choose series of reasonable length. If preaching through books of the Bible, pick shorter books or portions of larger ones. I've known people to preach the Book of Romans in five years. A year's preaching ought to be varied. A year-long series may lose people in its complexity and fail to offer the congregation a balanced diet. Here is a list of series you might consider...

- The Ten Commandments
- The Lord's Prayer
- The Beatitudes
- The Sermon on the Mount
- The Parables of Jesus
- The "I AM" statements of Jesus
- The Five "Solas"
- The Seven Churches of Revelation
- The Seven Last Words from the Cross
- The Seven Penitential Psalms
- The Seven Deadly Sins & Heavenly Virtues
- The Psalms of Ascent, 120-134
- Church History biographical sermons
- Conversions in the Book of Acts
- The Apostles Creed
- The Names of God
- The Attributes of God
- Messianic Psalms
- The Difficult Sayings of Jesus
- The Questions of Jesus
- World Religions
- Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer--John 17
- The Armor of God
- The Fruit of the Spirit

- Answering Objections to Faith
- Twelve Steps to Victory (AA/related Scriptures)
- Christian Myths—misperceptions about the Christian life
- The Feasts of Israel
- Top Ten Prayers of the Old Testament
- Bible Blessings & Benedictions

Types of Poor Preachers

-From Alistair Begg:

- The Cheerleader--always looking for applause.
- The Conjuror--pulling things out of the text which aren't there.
- The Storyteller--lots of stories; little teaching.
- The Entertainer--the Bible isn't enough, jokes, tricks, singing, dancing from the preacher are needed.
- The Systematiser--the text is merely the backdrop for hanging a doctrinal lecture on.
- The Psychologist--purveyors of helpful insight not necessarily from the Bible.
- The Naked Preacher--too much information about their faults or personal life.

-From Mark Loughridge:

- The Biblical Legalist--leaves people knowing what to do, but without the power to do it. Works without grace.
- The Batterer--making broken people feel miserable; the message is "try harder" but no one's ever good enough; all law and little gospel/grace.
- The Wall-builder--creates an 'us and them' mentality.
- The Teacher--lectures the flock; plenty of knowledge, but little in-depth sense of practical Christian living.

-From Bob Leroe:

- The Social Justice warrior--biased political commentary.

- The Cheerleader--gives pep talks to make everyone feel good.
- The More-is-better preacher--needs an hour to convey a 30-minute message.

Sermon Appraisal

Watch yourself on video, then try to step back and objectively evaluate the sermon as if you were a member of the congregation. Use the criteria from the section on search committees. Don't get overly discouraged or over confident.

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Filing

One day in college it occurred to me to put articles in files by topics. I started with a cardboard box and a stack of manila folders, which gradually grew with pages from magazines, on-line articles, fact-sheets from professors, and my own writings. Eventually I acquired a file cabinet, and it has been an essential resource over the years. I have separate accordion files for Advent, Lent, and World Religions. This may sound very "old school" in our technological age, but not everything is available on the internet. I turn to my files whenever a topic comes up to see what I've hidden away. Next to my professional library, my filing cabinet has been my most useful tool.

I recommend combing through files periodically to eliminate useless items. And because I can be lazy, next to my file cabinet is a box with things ready to be filed.

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Church matters

We are engaging with the world, and in so doing, we develop a reputation in our

community. Are we known for what we're against, or for what we believe? Are we making a positive impact? What is the "face" of your church?

- How do people learn about your church?
- What do they expect when they visit?
- What do you want them to experience when they visit?
- Are you focused on evangelism or the discipleship of believers?

It has been suggested that if a church is not increasing by at least 5% each year, it isn't growing... and if it's not growing, it's dying. *How do churches grow?*

- Churches grow warmer through friendship
- Churches grow deeper through training
- Churches grow stronger through worship
- Churches grow broader through community service
- Churches grow larger through faith-sharing
- Churches grow by the power of God through gifted people
- Churches grow in the knowledge of God through instruction
- Church growth is the natural result of church health

Turning a church around

All churches are somewhat messy. But some are in danger. At a monthly gathering of clergy I participate in, we came up with the following ways of reversing church dysfunction and decline:

- We are called to obedience, not success. We may need to redefine success.
- Longevity matters. Long-term pastorates tend to be best for parishes.
- Focus on your vision statement.
- Are we personality-driven or theology-driven?

- Conserve your energy... choose your battles wisely. Don't fall on your sword over everything. Some things you just have to live with.
- Work on evangelism within. Don't assume everyone is a converted and committed Christian.
- Try new things with the understanding that not every idea will work, and that's OK. If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it.
- Pastors need to know when to leave. Maybe the church needs a fresh voice, a new vision or direction.
- Renewal is on-going, just like sanctification.
- Determine if your facility is an asset or liability.
- It's not about you. It's about God.

Declining churches have stagnant health. They are in survival mode, trying to remain alive. The congregation is concerned but stuck. The focus is on the past. Programs are no-risk. The focus is preserving resources—facility and finances.

Reclining churches are stable and satisfied, focused on sustaining and maintaining the status quo. They are low-risk and complacent. Their programs are geared at reaching those in-house.

Growing churches are focused on building. They are future-focused. They try things and take risks. They are enthusiastic. Their mission is to reach their community.

Dealing with indifference

We all encounter people who claim they've ***gotten out of the habit of going*** to church. Perhaps they have gotten out of the habit of...

- Worshiping and singing praises to God
- Encouraging others, bearing their burdens
- Remembering the sacrifice of Christ at His Table
- Learning about the written word of God

- Participating in Christian service and outreach
- Helping children to know God
- Supporting the work of God

Church does matter. Being involved in a local church is a vital as breathing. Church gives us strength to handle the tough choices and stresses of life, and gives us opportunities to live out our faith as we actively participate in church ministries. Church is rooted in community; we're part of a family of faith. People miss a **lot** if they are only connected to church via the media. A sign of genuine faith is a commitment to a local group of fellow-believers.

“Let us consider how we can spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

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Youth Ministry

What Youth Pastors need to work on:

- **Relationships** are the backbone and most challenging aspect of youth ministry. Make a plan to spend one-on-one time with each youth, attend a football or soccer game, band concert, and go for a walk or for coffee. While you may feel the pressure to stay in the office doing on paper work, your youth will much appreciate the time and attention you gave them.
- **Strategic planning** to set up a schedule of events is essential, and this should be coordinated with the church staff and presented to the church council.

- **Find where teens fit**, while understanding individuality. In any high school there are sub-groups. These can include the athletic kids, the artsy ones, the troubled teens, the studious, college-bound ones, and sadly, the gang members. They all need to be reached. In any youth group (as in any congregation) there will be levels of commitment. Identify student leaders and consider forming a youth leadership team.
- **Contact the local schools** and find ways to visit your youth at school. Attend their special programs, concerts, athletic events. If students start a Bible Club, you may be allowed to lead or at least participate in it.
- **Enlist adult help** in providing food, transportation, fund-raising, and as chaperones. A youth group cannot thrive without parental support, making sure that their kids are in attendance on a regular basis.
- **The Senior Pastor** supports and oversees youth ministry but that doesn't mean he conducts it. The Pastor serves as a mentor to the Youth Leader and as a liaison between the youth and adults.
- **Communicate:** Social media, texting, emails, youth newsletter, verbal announcements, phone calls and whatever new thing comes along. Maintain regular contact with the parents.
- **Quality Space**—You need a youth room that is comfortable, with good furniture, audio-visual equipment, posters, game tables, and decorated by the teens.
- **Connect** with other youth groups, consult with other youth leaders, and plan joint activities.

- **Recreational activities...** laser tag, canoe trips, game nights, skiing, hiking, parties, etc. Make sure there is a spiritual dimension to these events.
- **Retreats...** an occasion where many teens make a special commitment to God.
- **Short-term mission trips...** these take a lot of planning, but the work is worth the effort.
- **Weekly meetings,** Bible studies, and individual discipleship will build up teens in their faith-walk.

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Membership

People join churches for a variety of reasons—to meet people, promote their business, gain respectability, to help their children to form a moral base, out of tradition, sometimes out of guilt, and because they are committed believers who wish to grow in their faith, to the glory of God.

Periodically pastors should look over their church roster and write to those who attend regularly but are not members, then follow-up personally by visit or phone. With regard to new members, no pressure is put on anyone to join. Most ministers would rather have five non-members who attend than ten members who don't.

Every church needs a **new member packet**, which includes:

- A brief history of the church
- Overview of the denomination
- Statement of Faith
- Who's who in the church
- The Mission of the church
- Privileges & responsibilities of members

- Signs of Spiritual Growth

Prospective members should fill out a **questionnaire**, which will reveal their intent...

- What brought you to attend our church?
- How long have you been attending our church?
- Why do you wish to make us your spiritual home?
- What are you looking for in a church family?
- If you are unsure whether to join, please list any concerns or questions you have about joining.
- Is there anything you'd like to know about our church?
- Are there any ministries of the church with which you're interested in becoming involved?
- You've been given a copy of our Statement of Faith. Do you understand and accept our doctrinal beliefs?
- We'd like to hear about your faith-journey. How did you come to faith in Christ?
- Please list any church positions, activities, ministries or groups in which you have participated in the past.
- What can we do to help you get involved?
- How will you be joining our church, by profession of faith, baptism, or letter of transfer?

The Board of Deacons (or Elders) will find a convenient time to meet with prospective members, preferably a few weeks prior to the actual ceremony. During this informal gathering they will explain their role and the support they can offer, and answer any questions. They accept candidates for membership by consensus. Normally congregations do not vote on new members.

Note—the meeting with the deacons is largely an information-sharing session, and not to determine the fitness of those who wish to join. Should a prospective member indicate that they take issue with a serious doctrinal position, the Pastor may be called on to dialogue and make recommendations. On non-essential doctrinal matters, we can agree to disagree while preserving unity among the Body of Christ.

A week prior to the installation of new members, the names of those joining will appear in the church bulletin and/or be shared during the announcement time. New members are usually received at a Communion Sunday. Exceptions may be considered, case-by-case, by the Board of Deacons in consultation with the Pastor.

The church will prepare *Certificates of Membership*. Couples joining will not be given individual certificates, but will have both their names on one certificate.

The Pastor conducts a Membership Liturgy during the worship service. Normally at the Pastor's invitation, the deacons and new members assemble in two separate groups at the front of the church for this ritual. At the close of the liturgy, the Deacons will be invited to extend their congratulations and blessing upon those joining. Some churches present new members a Bible and/or Christian book (such as Wayne Grudem's *Christian Doctrine* or R.C. Sproul's *Essential Truth's of the Christian Faith*).

The Church Clerk will be in place and the new members will sign the church book, the final part of the installation. The Pastor may make a few remarks while this is going on, or the music director may play some incidental music.

The congregation will be encouraged to greet the new members after church. New members are asked to join the Pastor at the rear of the church at the close of the service, so the congregation can greet them.

The Church Treasurer will ensure that new members are given a pledge sheet and will explain the offering envelope system, without making any kind of appeal—this is merely so that new members understand the procedures, which will provide them with necessary documentation for tax purposes.

The Pastor will send a letter to the new members, thanking them for joining the church.

Normally the Nominating Committee will wait a year before asking new members to participate in any boards, unless they express interest. New members who wish to work with our Christian Education program will need to fill out a CORI information form, as part of the Abuse Prevention Policy.

Membership Liturgy

Pastor, after asking those joining, and the deacons/elders to come forward...

The church is a community of faith, under the leadership of Christ. We gather as believers for worship, instruction, fellowship, service, and outreach. We unite together and discover our identity by belonging and becoming involved. It is through participating in the ministries of the church that we encounter God's empowering Presence: We learn and grow, we develop caring relationships, we become followers of Christ, and we find our place in God's Kingdom. We don't grow in isolation; we rely on one another to mature in our faith.

To those joining...

(Name/s of those joining): In becoming members of (name of church), you are coming under the authority of Christ and His word. Your joining with us is one event in a lifetime of learning and growing. Because you are joining by profession of faith, please join with us in reciting our historic affirmation, *The Apostles Creed*...

Do you here, in the presence of your friends and family, affirm that you accept the Bible as God's authoritative word, and have trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord?
(We do)

Do you desire to live as followers of Christ, by His enabling grace, through the ministries and mission of the church? (We do)

Do you commit to support your church with faithful attendance, by praying for its members, by inviting the un-churched to attend, and by sharing your abilities in Christian service? (We do)

To the congregation...

Do you welcome (names) into our church, and do you pledge to reach out to them with encouragement and prayerful support as they become a vital part of our Christian fellowship? (We do)

To those joining...

(Names of those joining): Through your profession of faith, we receive and welcome you into (name of church). This is the beginning of a faith-journey for you. The Apostle Paul writes, "He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day Jesus returns" (Philippians 1:6). The Good Shepherd, Who has hold of you, will never let go of your hand.

Prayer...

Holy Lord, we lift up these who have chosen to walk with us in our journey of faith. May they sense our love for them. Use them for Your glory; may they receive and be a blessing as they worship and work with us...in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—Amen.

Presentation of Certificates of Membership

Deacons come forward to greet the new members, and they sign the book from the Church Clerk.

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Welcoming and Affirming?

Every church has an agenda that states what they approve and disapprove of. Liberal churches like to advertise that they are “welcoming and affirming”, yet if conservatives showed up wearing an NRA hat, and made it clear they were pro-life, it is likely they wouldn’t be welcomed or affirmed. A liberal church in my neighborhood had an outdoor sign that stated: “*You can believe anything you wish*” and be welcome. If it doesn’t matter what we believe, why go to church? Without faith-based values, we might as well stay home and watch football. When pressed, liberal churches admit it does matter what one believes, because our beliefs determine our behavior.

It is more honest to say we are welcoming but not always affirming. We welcome everyone at our churches, but this doesn’t mean that we accept everyone’s behavior. For example...

We welcome:

Homosexuals

Adulterers

Polygamists

Fornicators

Alcoholics

Drug addicts

We welcome but don’t affirm:

Homosexuality

Adultery

Polygamy

Sexual immorality

Alcoholism

Drug abuse

Overeaters	Gluttony
People who swear	Profanity
Liars	Dishonesty
Thieves	Stealing
Abortionists	Abortion
Racists	Racism
Pedophiles	Pedophilia
Greedy people	Materialism
Gang members	Gang violence
Agnostics	Agnosticism and indifference
Sinners	Sin

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Church Planting

There are two ways to plant a church: Start from scratch, or begin with a core group from a large, established church—divide and multiply. Find a place to meet, and then start gathering people. Church plants often rent space from another church or purchase a church building from a congregation that has gone out of business. Some meet in movie theaters. There are especially gifted individuals whose special calling is to establish a new church plant, find them a settled pastor, and then depart to do it again.

One sad fact of church planting is the *takeover*. In my New England region a certain southern denomination has approached several church plants offering more funding if they will switch to their group. This occurs after the planning, intercessory prayer,

hard work, and financial support of the sponsoring church and denomination has occurred. This seems to discourage church planting, and it seems very unethical.

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Matters ministers hate to admit publicly *(sometimes even to themselves)...*

- We feel pressure to perform at peak level week-after-week. There is a self-imposed pressure to “*hit a home run*” every Sunday. We can be perfectionists, and we feel burdened to live up to (what we perceive to be) our parish’s expectations.
- When people leave, we take it personally. We’ve invested in their lives. They usually don’t tell us why, and they don’t give us a chance to make things right. We tend to think they left because of us (often it isn’t). We feel frustrated and we’re convinced we’ve failed. It hurts when they go to another church, and even more when they don’t go to any church.
- We measure success by the numbers. We’re convinced we need quantifiable results, a measurable contribution to God’s Kingdom, yet so much of ministry is intangible.
- We worry about what people think of us and we berate ourselves for not being as holy as we know we should be.
- We spend more time discouraged than encouraged. We start to think the success or failure of our church is resting on our efforts, when it is the work of the Holy Spirit. We know better, but that doesn’t stop us from thinking it’s all on us. At times it’s an impossible job.
- We struggle with competition and envy. We can’t help comparing ourselves to prominent, celebrity pastors who address large congregations, have popular pod-

casts and write books. It's hard to compete with them. Most of us will remain in humble circumstances and we need to learn to be content.

- We care too much about our legacy.
- Church is hard on our children. Being a PK/Preacher's Kid" isn't so great. Some of that is our fault.
- We struggle financially. Some of us are barely scraping by to make ends meet. We have little money saved up for retirement.
- Some of us find it easy to be prophetic, but most of us find it hard to say what our people need to hear. Congregations resist change.
- We focus on ministry to the neglect of having a life. We rarely do any pleasure-reading. Many of us have no hobbies. We are in danger of neglecting our families as well. Ministry can become idolatry.
- We often feel that we haven't done enough, that even our best isn't good enough. We need to be faithful--period.

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Pulpit Supply Checklist

When asked to fill in for a pastor, here is what you need to ask:

- Is there a worship leader/liturgist?
- What is your worship style (traditional, contemporary, blended)?
- Is there a prayer time before the service?
- Do you use visuals for the sermon, and who should I email them to?

- Besides the sermon, what else do you wish me to do in the service, such as announcements, prayers, the Lord's Supper, etc.?
- Should I wear a clergy robe? What does the Pastor usually wear?
- Is there a Children's Sermon?
- Who do I send bulletin input?
- Can I have a sermon outline printed in the bulletin?
- Can you email me a copy of the bulletin?
- Is parking available?
- Do you want a brief bio on me for the bulletin?
- I usually sing a solo and the Benediction; is that OK?
- *Don't ask how much you'll be paid; take whatever is given.*

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Publicity

A church isn't a business, yet like a business, it needs promotion. We have to get the word out and advertise. There are many ways...

- Website—more and more people are choosing where to worship on the internet, and a website needs to communicate who we are, what we believe, and what we're offering. And the address and phone need to be near the top.
- Social media—Facebook and Twitter are viable ways to advertise who we are. When you post something, encourage your "followers" to repost on their feed so more will see what's going on at your church.
- Phone calls—when major events occur, take the time to call people, especially those who aren't regulars.
- Newspapers—have in your budget money for paid advertising, but also volunteer to write a Clergy Column. Many papers have a church page, which will let the public know what's happening, at no charge.

- Postcards—a church I served sent out postcards to everyone in town to promote their Advent activities. It was costly, but every family was reached.
- Christian radio—paid advertisements read on-air promoting your church.
- Letters to newcomers in town. Sometimes realtors can assist with letting you know who's new in your community.
- Posters—maintain a list of places in town where you can hang posters for special occasions.
- Signs—an attractive outdoor sign can promote events to all who drive by. Some churches have electronic signs where they can change the message to promote special events.
- Word of mouth—The most effective advertising is when people in your congregation reach out to people in their sphere of influence and invite their friends and co-workers to church.

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Worship

How come seminaries don't offer a course on worship? Seminarians are preparing for a profession where worship is a critical factor. They will be leading worship, urging people to worship, but how do they conduct worship? By the way, a close friend of mine is a Catholic priest, and their seminaries don't teach about worship either.

I find it interesting how many theologically conservative churches tend to be liberal with regard to worship. Nearly anything goes (*that includes smoke machines*). Eugene Peterson warns, "Religion as entertainment is always more attractive, but it is also less true" (*Working the Angles*).

Evangelical churches are increasingly being faced with conflict over whether to maintain a traditional, contemporary, or blended format. This can result in "worship

wars” when people demand their way. Larger churches can have separate services to accommodate the congregation’s preferences.

Church is, according to Jesus, primarily a house of prayer (Mt 21:13). Charles Spurgeon, the “Prince of Preachers,” stated that, if given the option of preaching or praying, he would pray. Focus on the primacy of prayer. Consider writing out your prayers rather than praying extemporaneously. If you were going to brief the Governor, you’d come prepared; yet we rush into God’s presence without any forethought... which is perhaps OK in personal, private praying, but in public worship our prayers ought to be more substantive. Consult prayer books for examples of pulpit prayers.

Guided prayer is helpful in worship. It is a non-traditional means of corporate intercessory prayer. We explain how we will direct the group to silently pray for specific needs. Rather than listen to one person pray, the entire group participates in prayer, praying for particular matters. Here are some petitions you might include:

- Let’s begin by telling Jesus how much we love Him....
- Offer thanks for His mercy and forgiveness....
- Pray for opportunities to share God’s love....
- We now confess our sin to God and ask for His strength....
- Remember the needs of your loved ones....
- Talk to the Lord about those seated near you....
- Speak to God about those with whom you’d like a better relationship....
- Ask God for help in any decisions you’re facing....
- Intercede for peace in our world....
- For one whose child has become a stranger, let us pray to the Lord...
- For one whose parents have become a burden, let us pray to the Lord...
- Ask God to strengthen those whose every waking hour is filled with pain...

- Bring before God those facing major transitions in life...
- Speak for those whose faith has been shaken...
- Pray for the ministries of your church....
- Lift up those who are living in abusive situations....
- Pray for the homeless and others who need employment....
- Ask God to help soldiers and families facing the stresses of deployments....
- Request that the Great Physician touch those who are sick....
- Lift up those in positions of leadership in the military and in government....
- Speak for students struggling with studies and who are seeking God's will....
- Pray for someone you know who needs the Lord....
- Remember in prayer the specific requests mentioned a few minutes ago....
- Perhaps there's *one more thing* you'd like to tell the Lord...

“Holy Father, we know You hear our prayers, because we make our requests in the Name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus, Who has taught us to pray, saying (Lord's Prayer).”

That is a long list, and I recommend you pick six or seven of these for one session.

Praying in public--for pastors and laity

Many people are fearful of public speaking, so you can imagine how they must feel about praying in front of others. Whether it is a church service, prayer breakfast, an invocation for a civic organization, opening a small group Bible study, or even in front of one's family, it isn't always comfortable praying out loud. Here are some ways to make it easier...

- Be yourself--use words that sound like you. Prayer is talking to God. You don't have to use formal, *King James* language with lots of *Thees* and *Thous*. Use words that everyone can understand, while remaining reverent.

- Although you may be in front of a large group of people, it may help to realize that *their eyes are closed*; they're not looking at you, so concentrate on your prayer, not on them.
- Don't rush your prayer; take time and speak deliberately and clearly.
- It is appropriate in private prayer to go on at length, but in public prayers a minute or two is appropriate and preferable. I've heard some sermon-length prayers and I felt I was enduring rather than listening to them.
- Impromptu prayers are also fine in private prayer, but in public worship have at least an outline to guide you, plus a few thoughts to get you started.
- Extemporaneous/spontaneous prayers can sound casual and careless, as if the speaker were saying, in effect: "Lord, I can't wait to hear what I'm about to say!" Thomas Howard warns that "it is an ordeal to keep such prayers 'fresh'. You are reduced to piecing together a sequence of phrases familiar in your tradition."
- Written prayers are excellent but do not feel bound to read them word-for-word. The advantage in this is that you can carefully consider what you wish to pray. Many of the prayers of the Bible were composed in private but prayed in public. Write as you speak and try not to make it sound like you're reading a prayer.
- Don't preach when you pray ("We know God says in Scripture..."). Don't speak of God; speak to Him.
- Avoid heavy theological language and church slang.
- Avoid both humor and solemn heaviness.
- Avoid what Robert Webber calls "the Just Prayer": "Lord, we just want to come before you, Lord, and just want to thank you for just being with us..."
- Be sensitive to the needs and concerns of the congregation. Intercessory prayer means you are praying in their behalf.
- It's a prayer, not a performance.

- The tone and point of view of a prayer should reflect the overall message of Scripture.
- Some people repeat God's name so much, it sounds like a substitute for "uh."
- When we pray by ourselves we have the luxury of long pauses and groans "too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). These aren't appropriate for public prayers.
- Strive for a balance between being formal and informal; avoid both affected "Cathedral voice" and casual, chummy prayers. Aim at reverence and awe.
- Is it necessary to end prayers "in Jesus' Name"? The Lord's Prayer (our model) and the other prayers of Jesus do not have a set closing phrase. The content of our prayer will determine if it is a Christian prayer. You might try ending with "In Your triune (or thrice-holy) Name," or "In Your strong and mighty Name." Or simply end with an Amen.
- When we pray in front of others, we do so as fellow-strugglers. We pray out of our own woundedness.

We are in an age in which consumer-driven worship reflects the culture when it should be counter-cultural. I think contemporary worship has become popular because of ministers attending seminars where there is great music and great preaching. They return home thinking they should adapt this format. The problem is, the "order of worship" becomes mainly two things: Singing & Sermon. I attended such a service with my wife, and afterwards she said to me, "I don't feel like I've worshipped." I whole-heartedly agreed.

Many years ago I read a paradigm-shifting book by Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*. Webber tries to explain that liturgical doesn't have to mean liberal. Worship ought to be rich and substantive.

There is much diversity in the Body of Christ, which translates into a variety of worship styles. According to Michael Mangis, there are various ways to describe the worship of our pluralistic fellowship of believers:

- **Contemplative**- Quiet listening and intimacy with God through silence, spirituality, and solitude to illuminate the dark.
- **Holiness**- Striving against sin and seeking after virtue and righteousness
- **Charismatic**- Yielding to the power of the Spirit to transform us into Christ's image.
- **Evangelical**- Proclaiming and celebrating the Good News of God's Kingdom.
- **Incarnational**- Focusing on Christ within us, through symbolism and liturgy.

There is a place for everyone in the church; we simply find where we best fit.

There are many ways that people draw near to God:

- **Naturalists** love God best when they are outdoors.
- **Sensates** love God best when all their senses are engaged.
- **Traditionalists** love God best when they're able to retain familiar rituals and symbols.
- **Ascetics** love God best in solitude and simplicity.
- **Activists** love God best when they are battling social injustice and evil.
- **Caregivers** love God best through caring for those who hurt.
- **Enthusiasts** love God best by experiencing celebration.
- **Contemplatives** love God best through quiet adoration, solitude, and meditation.
- **Intellectuals** love God best when their minds are fully engaged.

However we connect to God, we all worship most effectively with others, in church. Some church worship is structured and liturgical; others worship with spontaneity

and informality. Some churches try to connect to ancient traditions, while others strive to be relevant and modern. The Bible doesn't give an "order of worship" so we're free to express ourselves and our cultural heritage in our praise. Theologian Karl Barth observed, "Christian worship is the most urgent, momentous, and glorious action that can take place in the human life." Anglican Bishop J.C. Ryle pointed out, "The best public worship is that which produces the best private Christianity."

A minister told me, "My faith tradition is anti-traditional." G.K. Chesterton said that tradition is the only true democracy because it means giving a vote to your ancestors. Others regard tradition as "peer pressure from dead people." People who proudly reject tradition usually get comfortable into a system of their own making, which in twenty years becomes a tradition.

As a former Army chaplain, I tried to cover all the denominational bases, and it wasn't easy. In trying to accommodate everyone I wondered if I was pleasing anyone. I had every kind of Christian you can imagine show up at my services under the military label of "General Protestant" worship (now called "Collective Protestant"). With such a diverse, pluralistic congregation, I attempted to offer a blend of the formal and informal. I pretty much do that now. My order of worship has structure and liturgy, but it's also contemporary but (I hope) not stuffy. The written portions use modern language, not stilted old-fashioned expressions.

Sometimes it didn't work. An Army wife who attended my Gospel Service (another "general" service, but of African-American denominations), visited my more generic (and white) service to make an announcement about the Protestant Women of the Chapel. She was used to a much livelier worship service. Afterwards she said to me, "Chaplain, I really appreciated your service this morning; it was so... *peaceful*." I had to laugh inside. She was groping for something positive and diplomatic to say. I was sure she felt the service seemed dull! It's all what we're used to, I suppose.

During Lent the churches of my town join other churches for an ecumenical evening service. As the President of the Saugus Clergy Association, I tell the host pastors to run the service as they generally would, with an understanding that people will be there who are used to a different worship style. We are broadened by experiencing other forms of worship. Sometimes we ourselves may want to do things differently, or at least to be open to the leading of the Lord. A Pastor prayed one Sunday from the pulpit: “Lord, do something for us today that isn’t in the bulletin.”

Opening Quotes for Sunday Worship

I think a worship service ought to begin with a declaration, an opening statement. I like to begin with a solid quote that tells what we’re about. If your church has a mission or vision statement, you could start with that, or try every week to begin with a quote. Here are some...

- Christian worship proceeds from awe to pardon to dedication.
- In worship we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves.
- Worship is a prophetic act of resistance to the idolatry of the age.
- It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men. -C.S. Lewis
- Worship is our response to what God has done.
- Worship starts the moment we begin to separate ourselves from the world so we can join the rest of the Body of Christ.
- As people come to our gatherings, do they see so much love that they actually get a glimpse of God? -Francis Chan
- Never underestimate the blessed consequences of one adoring act of worship.
- The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of: our attention would have been on God. –C.S. Lewis

- When we begin to glimpse the reality of God, the natural reaction is to worship Him. Not to have that reaction is a fairly sure sign that we haven't yet really understood who He is or what He's done. –N.T. Wright
- We approach God in worship with an attitude of joyful seriousness.
- Worship is a gathering of God's people who care about Him and each other.
- Worship is a time of getting and giving, of receiving and being a blessing.
- Worship is not only an hour we spend each week, it is a way of life.
- Worship is a dialogue between God and His people.
- Worship is an offering of our lives to God—it's not what we "get" out of worship but what we "give".
- Worship is a journey of the heart, a renewal of the spirit, a pause in our lives to rekindle love and friendship.
- Worship happens when God's Spirit dances for joy in our hearts.
- God is enthroned through the worship of His people.
- Worship should be an aesthetic experience, exulting in beauty, resplendent and heavenly, prefiguring Heaven on earth. (Eastern Orthodox view)
- Worship gets us through the hardest times in our lives because it shifts our focus from the problem to the problem Solver.
- Worship celebrates what God has done in Christ—which gives hope, new life, and community. It enables us to grasp and respond to the good work of God.
- Worship is an attempt to express the inexpressible.
- The "call to worship" comes before one enters the sanctuary. We should go to church as worshippers, rather than going to church to worship... one is already worshipping when one enters the Lord's house.
- Praise is the appropriate response to God's greatness.

- We come to congregate, celebrate, commemorate, communicate, and contemplate.
- Christian worship is the most urgent, momentous, and glorious action that can take place in the human life. –Karl Barth
- The best public worship is that which produces the best private Christianity. –J.C. Ryle
- We're worshipping God, not for what He does for us, but because of what He is to us.
- Worship is when we're aware that what we've been given is far greater than what we can give.

To worship is:

- To stir the conscience by the holiness of God
- To feed the mind with the truth of God
- To awaken the imagination with the beauty of God
- To open the heart to the love and appreciation of God
- To devote the will to the purpose of God

All the world reveals God's glory—our worship proclaims it!

Worship gatherings are not always spectacular, but they are always supernatural. We come hungry to respond, react, and receive from God for who He is and what He has done. –Matt Chandler

Worship enables us to experience reverence in the presence of God.

Public worship is a victory celebration.

Praise is our response to what is objectively good in itself, intrinsically valuable, worthy of celebrating.

God inhabits the praise of His people. –Robert Webber

Praise is the most appropriate response to God's greatness.

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Leading Bible Studies

Small group learning is about sharing various insights, questions, and growing together in our understanding of God's word. We each bring something to the table. We all have something to contribute.

After you've gotten some interested participants in a comfortable setting and the coffee's brewing, what do you do? Here are some practical guidelines...

Options:

- Use a published group Bible study guide. There are many good ones available.
- Bible-only... and decide ahead: should we all use the same translation? It can be helpful to have a variety of translations to compare.
- Topical or Through-a-Book
- Discuss a book by a trusted Christian author... not a Bible Study per se, but similar in that you're discussing biblical truths.
- Structure: individual blocks-of-instruction or *"We stop at the end of the hour wherever we happen to be."*

Guidelines:

- Welcome seekers by creating a friendly, comfortable place to learn about God.
- Begin and end on time.
- Open and close in prayer.
- I like to bring my guitar and lead the group in a praise song or two.
- Come prepared to guide, not lecture. That being said, the leader should prepare and know the material well.
- In the course of the conversation you may offer some observations of your own, but try not to dominate the group.
- Look at Scripture a paragraph at a time. Read the passage aloud.

- The key to good teaching is asking good questions and initiating meaningful discussions—not “yes” or “no” responses. *Example:* “Why did Moses have to wait so long to lead Israel out of Egypt, and what does that mean for us?”
- Distractions and side-issues will inevitably happen. The leader should know when to respectfully get everyone back to the topic when the group strays.
- The class should be encouraged to ask questions, share insights, even (*cordially*) disagree.
- There will be questions you can’t answer, which is OK. No one has all the answers.
- Depend on the Holy Spirit to illumine the text and apply it to lives.
- Be a good listener.
- When people give a wrong answer, don’t correct them; simply ask, “OK; what do the rest of you think?” They may not have understood the question; also try re-stating it.
- Keep things light; use humor occasionally to maintain a positive, friendly group atmosphere.
- You’re running a group study, not a support group. The focus is learning God’s word, not group therapy.
- Encourage but don’t demand participation. No pressure.
- Observation: “What does the text *say*?”
- Interpretation: “What does it *mean*?”
- Application: “So *what*? What am I supposed to *do* with this information?”
- Visual aids (charts, outlines, maps, diagrams) enhance the learning.
- Maintain a class roster and encourage those who miss to return.
- Figure in time for fellowship.

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Church Appraisal

Don't get complacent. From time-to-time you may need to evaluate the mission of your church. This can be conducted by an impartial outside agency (denominational or para-church) or internally. Gather the leadership and answer the following questions...

- What would we say are the key goals of our ministry?
- How might we describe our relationship to the community?
- Reputation--what are people outside of our church saying about us? Are we known more for what we're for or what we're against?
- What is it that energizes/excites us about our church?
- What attracts people to our church... why do they come?
- When we brag about our church, what do we tend to say?
- What do we like the most... and the least about our church?
- Why do people take on leadership positions here?
- Why do we stay here?
- What might cause people to leave our church?
- How do we feel about our mission statement?
- What change(s) would make this a better ministry?
- What would you not change?
- Spirituality--can we say that people here are growing in faith as committed followers of Christ?
- Stewardship--are our material assets properly maintained? Are we anticipating structural needs of our facility?
- Coordination--are our boards and committees talking to one another?
- Finances--Are we monetarily secure? Do we encourage giving without sounding like all we care about is money? How are our fund-raising activities going?
- Publicity--how are we promoting our ministries? How might we more effectively "get the word out"?

- Do church council meetings address the needs of the congregation? Do people feel free to express their concerns and opinions? Are we following proper procedures?
- Are we recruiting sufficient numbers of volunteers?
- Are we utilizing people's strengths/giftedness?
- Do we effectively resolve conflicts within our parish?
- Are we satisfied with the salary and benefits allocated for the pastor and church staff?
- Are we properly observing the liturgical events of the church year?
- Does the worship reflect creativity and reverence, or is it looking more like an entertaining pep-rally? Is our worship too formal or too informal?
- How are we assisting those interested in joining our church? Are they being adequately informed of our history, goals, ministries and beliefs?
- Are we satisfied with our church newsletter, photo directory, and website?
- Are we a mission-minded church, concerned about the Great Commission?
- How are our small groups faring? (Bible studies, fellowship groups, etc.)
- Are we reaching our youth adequately? How is the health of our Sunday School and Teen Youth Group?
- Are we involved in social service activities in town?
- Is our worship music God-honoring and of good quality?
- How might we rate our various fellowship activities?
- Are there areas of technology upgrade we should consider for our church?
- Do we reflect the secular culture or project a Christian worldview?
- Are we involved with and supportive of our denomination?
- Are we connecting with other like-minded churches in our area?
- Are we remaining doctrinally true to our heritage, and are we properly following our polity?
- Harmony--is everyone happy, satisfied, working together well?
- Do we have a clear strategy for outreach and growth?

- Are we making a difference in the community? If our church closed today, would it be noticed and missed? Would it matter at all in our town?
- If the pastor was called away to some other ministry, would our church fall apart or close?
- What is one thing we want God to do in our midst, something impossible for anyone to get the credit for but Him?
- What is most important about us, what's the *bottom-line*?
- Are we doing all to the glory of God?

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Church Etiquette

- Pew “ownership”—if you like a particular seat, arrive early enough to claim it. It's unreasonable to ask someone to give up a seat they're in because you normally sit there.
- Maintaining silence before God—when the prelude begins, please end conversations and give your quiet attention to preparation for worship. Offer a silent prayer that the service will effectively make a difference in our lives.
- Visitors—they're our guests; be friendly, introduce yourself and make them feel welcome.
- Pew Bibles and Hymnals—please treat with respect, and bring to the office's attention if any are in need of repair. We encourage everyone to keep their Bibles open during the sermon.
- Appropriate attire—please dress in such a way that does not call attention to yourself, in a modest, neat fashion. Casual, comfortable, attire that is respectful is fine. We don't have a strict dress code. Don't look down on people who aren't dressed as nicely as you.
- Shhh—please turn off or put on mute cell phones and tablets before entering the church... and no Instant Messaging during the service, please.

- Entering/exiting during the service—We’d rather you come late than not at all, but please be quiet and unobtrusive. If for medical reasons you need to stand, there is adequate room in the back of the sanctuary.
- Communion Table and Altar—personal items ought not be placed on these tables.
- Language that honors God—speak in a manner respectful of God’s house; avoid political, entertainment, or sports discussions; try to focus on getting to know the people you fellowship with better.
- Be nice—avoid gossip and criticism; maintain a positive attitude.
- Children—please monitor them; encourage them to be calm, and not to draw on pew cards. Explain to them what worship is about; explain what’s in the order of worship. Bring a notebook so they can draw pictures of what they learned in Sunday School, and encourage them to come forward for the Children’s Sermon.
- No food, beverages, or chewing gum in the sanctuary, except for nursing mothers or individuals with medical needs.
- Reverence—we approach worship with wonder, awe, and celebration. Praise is the appropriate response to God’s greatness. Some people raise their hands in worship; some feel led to punctuate the praise with an “amen”. This is perfectly fine, so long as we’re calling attention to God, and not ourselves.

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Church Splits

“Come, let us reason together, says the Lord,” Isaiah 1:11.

While in seminary, at the end of class, I’d occasionally say, “Let’s make like a church and split!” It is a sad testimony before an unbelieving world when congregations and denominations split over petty matters. Increasingly differences regarding music and worship style are causing divisions within congregations. Other common causes are

a scandal by a church leader or prominent member, and differences over financial matters. The root of dissention is often a selfish drive for power and control by individuals and groups.

The tragic and inevitable consequence of a split is the negative impact within the community. Rather than be known for the fruit of the Spirit, the congregation is known for internal dissention. This only harms their spiritual impact. There are no winners in church splits. They result in a reputation for disharmony and a legacy of dissention.

Are there appropriate reasons for a split? Yes--over theology. By this I don't mean non-essential doctrines such as eschatology or election, but key, fundamental teachings such as the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ. When a church body has forsaken the orthodox teachings of historic Christianity, it is time to part ways. This is common in denominations that are ideologically mixed, with liberal and conservative churches. The two opposite positions are embattled in fight for dominance.

Regardless of the reasons, the consequences of any church schism are devastating and long-lasting. They bring a significant loss to all involved. They are much like death and divorce; both bring significant hurt. A time of healing and recovery is necessary. Clergy care is essential; church splits scar ministers for the rest of their ministry.

When the cause is not over doctrine, there ought to be proposals towards seeking compromise, reconciliation and mutual forgiveness. Perhaps an outside, objective arbitrator can be called in to heal the rift. Hurt feelings and resentments need to be addressed along with the root causes.

Church is often messy, because it is composed of flawed people in varying degrees of commitment to Christ. Those who differ need to stay dialogical and focused.

Problem solving and conflict resolution requires mutual effort. Communication—going beyond what is said to what is meant—is essential. *“We may not think alike, but we need to think together.”* Listen responsively, ask for clarification, and do not assume intent.

Churches in conflict ought to consider having a **Fair Fight for Change**, a strategy to resolve differences, a method of negotiation...

1. **Define** the problem clearly from both points-of-view. You may just discover that you don’t even agree on what the problem is! Know what you’re in conflict over, and give each other a chance to confirm or clarify what it is you’re disagreeing over.
2. State what you can **agree** on.
3. Brainstorm together all possible **alternatives** to the problem. Write out each course of action and the pros and cons of each. When people claim they can’t think of any options, it’s usually because they *don’t want to*.
4. State what **changes**, compromises you are willing to make to arrive at a solution. How flexible are you?
5. Summarize the best **solution** you have considered.
6. **Pray** together that God will help you take the steps necessary to reach that resolution.

In this process there should be no winner or loser—the goal is for *both* sides to win, because they’re on the same team!

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people dwell together in unity!” Psalm 133:1

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Visitation

A pastor colleague told me, “Visit everyone who attends your church, and when

you're done, visit them *again*." Visitation is time-consuming, yet necessary. I was taught in college that pastors should maintain distance from their congregations, and my professor (a former pastor) said he was proud that he never visited his flock in their homes. He should have been defrocked. How can we get to know the needs of our people if we don't spend time with them? It is important to have a warm and close relationship with our parish.

There is a difference between a social and pastoral visit. A social call, while pleasant and cordial, usually deals with superfluous matters. A pastoral conversation is intentional about matters of spiritual importance. At the end, ask "How can I pray for you?" and close in prayer.

Serving as an Interim Pastor with one car and my wife obligated to teach at another church made it necessary for me to ask for rides to and from church. I was afraid this would keep me from serving, but the congregation was glad to help me out. This seeming dilemma helped me get to know the people. It turned out to be a good thing!

Contact church visitors by phone and ask if you can stop by their home. Your visit may be the deciding factor that convinces them to join your church.

Visit the sick, and encourage your congregation to keep you informed. I tell my church that I would rather hear about someone in the hospital ten times than not at all.

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Clericals

As an Army Chaplain, I had a distinct advantage over many of my civilian Protestant colleagues: Instant Recognition. Soldiers saw the cross on my uniform and knew I

was the Chaplain. For civilian clergy, by wearing a clerical collar, our occupation becomes obvious to everyone, and often opens doors. This is especially true in hospital and prison visits. Ministers in clericals are identified as professionals with a task to do. Staff will immediately recognize clergy in clericals; they understand our role and why we're there. We can get in after visiting hours, and when praying with a patient, we are less likely to be interrupted. If such attire goes against your tradition, another option is to have shirts embroidered with a cross and your name and title.

Clergy are becoming casual with the advent of contemporary worship. The Hebrew Bible states that those leading worship wore robes with distinctive markings. Not everyone favors clergy attire. I posted a photo of me conducting a service on Facebook wearing my robe and stole, and someone commented, "Join the 21st Century." Worship implies reverence, and the wearing of a pulpit robe and stole lends dignity to the service. Also they aren't focusing on my suit and tie. At one church I served, someone commented on my robe: "It's nice to be able to know who the minister is." It has been argued that wearing a pulpit robe in church might make the place too religious, too churchy. Isn't that why people are coming? At another church a visitor walked out when our youth pastor gave the sermon in casual clothes, complaining to me afterwards how the young man's attire was inappropriate. I think a good rule to follow is: What would you wear to conduct a wedding or funeral? It is said that appearance matters, because you can often tell a lot about people by looking at how they present themselves. It mattered to me when I was in the Army, and it matters now.

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Stewardship

A minister wanted to impress his congregation with the need to increase giving. He described extensive repairs needed to overhaul the sanctuary. Just as he was about to ask the ushers to come forward to collect the offering, a piece of plaster fell from

the ceiling and hit a man square on the head. He stood up and declared, “I’ll give a thousand dollars!” The minister then looked heavenward and prayed, “Lord, hit him again!”

People give to the church for a variety of reasons...

- Some see the collection as an admission fee, as dues;
- Some are seeking a tax deduction;
- Some give because of manipulative pleas for money;
- Some hope to appease God (yet no one can buy their way into Heaven);
- Some give so that God will reward them with prosperity, as if they were making a financial investment or seeking a quid pro quo;
- Some give out of gratitude for their many blessings and concern for the advancement of the Gospel message.

People claim the church is only interested in money, when it is usually far from most pastors’ minds. Yet offerings must be taken, pledge drives are necessary, and something must be said about giving. I usually say before the Sunday offering that our giving is a reflection of our devotion to God and is in itself an act of worship. An elderly lady told me she didn’t appreciate the pressure (?) I was putting on her to give, and she said that when she died, the church wouldn’t get anything. I didn’t think my words were very forceful or demanding. Yet despite her angry threat, when she passed, her lawyer told me she had left a significant bequest to the church.

Pledge letters are a reminder to the congregation that the bills must be paid. We need to explain our needs, but we can appeal to our people without pressure. This is between them and God. Remind everyone that the annual budget is about ministry and mission. People don’t give to support budgets. They give to support people and programs. Don’t apologize for requesting support. You need to ask, but don’t use pressure tactics. I believe in tithing, but I’ve never forced it on anyone, though one Sunday I quipped that *“We are fit to be tithed.”*

Help people to give more by having personal financial management training. Help people learn to budget, how they can get out of debt, and how to save for the future.

Pastors often say that God wants a portion of our time, talent, and treasure. Stewardship isn't just about money. The mark of a healthy church is when everyone is doing *something*. At one church I served, on the back of our bulletin was a breakdown of everyone who was volunteering one way or another. I regarded it as an indicator of why we were successful. There were very few who were merely filling a pew.

"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than you can spare." –C.S. Lewis

"The worst sin against stewardship is to waste your life." –R.C. Sproul

"Giving reminds us that the world doesn't revolve around us." –Dave Ramsay

"Earn all you can; save all you can; give all you can." –John Wesley

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Volunteers

My church needed a 4th grade Sunday School teacher. Our religious education director brought the class to the front of the church, explained the need, and the kids pretended to cry because they had no teacher. We got a volunteer right away. She told me, laughing, "I can't take it, I have to help!" It was funny, and it worked.

It isn't easy recruiting and retaining volunteers. Here are some tips...

- Build a relationship before asking someone to volunteer.
- People are waiting to be asked, personally, not by a blurb in the bulletin.

- People may wonder, “What can I possibly do?” Maybe more than they think. Perhaps they should start small (fold bulletins) then consider what they’d *like* to do.
- Limit how much people volunteer—there are always a few people in every church who do too much. We shouldn’t over-burden them.
- Focus on the fact that everyone can do something and everyone ought to. One’s interests can help them determine what to do. Pastors aren’t mind-readers. If your church needs a church photographer, you probably don’t know who is good at this.
- List needs in the bulletin and mention them before the offering. Stewardship is more than money; it’s about using our unique talents for the Kingdom.
- Have a Nominating Committee tasked with recruiting volunteers.
- Let people know they can make a difference, and help them realize the impact of their service for God.
- Make the effort worth their time—match volunteers with meaningful tasks.
- Set time limits so they don’t think they’re signing up for life.
- Provide training workshops and materials. Equip them to succeed.
- Occasionally offer volunteers a year off, a well-deserved break.
- List in the bulletin all the board and committee members and those doing special work on their own. I would often point to this page and say, “This is a big reason why our church is successful.”
- Send thank-you notes by mail or email.
- Highlight the work of volunteers in your newsletter and on social media.
- Promote the work volunteers do by having a portion of the worship service to focus on their ministry.
- Have an annual volunteer luncheon.
- *Gifts* for volunteers—a church mug, plate, Christmas ornament, church volunteer t-shirt, a popular Christian book or CD.
- Remember, what volunteers *do* is not their true value.

Mentoring

II Timothy 2:2, “You have heard me teach many things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others” (NLT).

What is Mentoring?

- The word comes from a Greek word meaning “enduring”
- An exchange of acquired wisdom
- Being an example, role model, advisor, teacher, coach, friend
- An important relationship whereby we impart to others the lessons we’ve learned
- Giving feedback and encouragement
- “Showing the ropes”
- Availability and accountability

Why Mentor?

- Share the wealth / knowledge / power
- Guide the next generation of leaders
- Give back to your community and organization
- Make a difference in someone’s life

Spiritual Mentoring - Discipleship

- The word “disciple” means “learner”, “pupil”, or “apprentice”
- Spiritual formation / guidance / direction
- Teaching the basics of the Christian life, applying the Bible to life
- Helping believers discover their role/place in God’s Kingdom
- Passing on the tools of spiritual growth

Content of Mentoring Sessions

- Appraisal of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and hurdles
- Skill acquisition
- Life Values and Purpose... Why am I here?
- Life Goals and objectives... in education, fitness, health, spiritual, relational, creative, vocational, financial
- Blowing off steam
- Review progress
- Open communication

When I was a young, inexperienced Army chaplain, I went to see a Chaplain who had been in the Army for over 20 years. I asked if he could give me some career guidance, and his dismissive answer was, “I don’t know what to tell you.” He either didn’t know much about the military, which is unlikely (you don’t make Colonel by being ignorant), or he didn’t wish to impart his knowledge. All Chaplains have supervisors, but they are not always mentors. Knowledge is power, and in a competitive military some people don’t wish to share. What amazed me was that I hardly posed a threat to this Colonel. Nonetheless he didn’t want to pass on his wisdom. I may have over-reacted to this unsatisfying conversation. As I gained experience and understanding, I shared it with others, often whether they wanted my input or not. Rarely have I received anything to help me better serve. We need to share the wealth!

Not long ago I wrote an article on “ministry of presence” and emailed it to chaplains I know. It honestly wasn’t an *ego-thing*; I was simply trying to be helpful and generous. I hope for the most part my sharing is appreciated and useful (except for a few people who bought this e-book for the Amazon Kindle, most of you reading this received it from me via email for free). I’ve urged Chaplains, over which I had oversight as their Ecclesiastical Endorser, to pass on their learning with others, to be a true mentor. As a retired Army Chaplain I mentor seminarians pursuing the military chaplaincy. I tell lots of “war stories” and give materials I’ve compiled to help them

succeed in this unique ministry. If we all did this, we'd all be a whole lot smarter and much more effective. The question is: *Why don't we?* Do we feel threatened, are we being selfish, or do we think we have little to offer? When was the last time you took the time to share a good idea with someone? Let's build one another up for the sake of God's Kingdom.

We can become mentors by being part of a big-brother/sister organization, by serving as a coach, by being involved in Scouting (even if it's only as a merit badge advisor), by teaching Sunday School, and by offering to help junior people working in our organization. And no matter how far we've gone in our careers, we need mentoring. I heard it said, "Every chaplain needs a chaplain... the chaplain who has himself as a chaplain has a FOOL as a chaplain." Self-care isn't sufficient. We need the feedback, encouragement, and accountability that comes from a mentoring relationship, one in which we both take and give.

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Pastors' Spouses

I was in a seminary class one day, and the professor asked, "If someone is applying to be a pastor at your church, what is the *first question* you'd want to ask him?" Someone answered, "Does his wife play the piano?"

What role should the pastor's spouse play in the church? The New Testament is clear about the calling and responsibilities of pastors, but says *nothing* about their spouses. There is no biblical office for a pastor's spouse. They are free to be happy, healthy, growing disciples. They are free to use their gifts and abilities to serve the church, but *not* because they are a pastor's spouse. They are free to pursue a career. They are not required to engage in ministry. There should be no expectations from within the congregation on what a spouse does, says, wears, or believes. The church hired the minister... period.

Some clergy spouses create ministries, become spiritual leaders, and are highly involved in the life of the church. They regard their ministry vocation as a joint calling. And their churches often are quick to compare the next clergy spouse to them. The next spouse can easily resent such comparisons. When told “You have big shoes to fill” a new minister’s wife should reply: “I brought my own shoes.” The calling of a pastor’s spouse is to be committed to marriage, not ministry. No one likes being defined by what their spouse does.

Quite often churches hire clergy who are not from their region, which should cause the congregation to make an extra effort to ensure the pastor’s family feel accepted and comfortably at home. Churches can be culturally cliquish, filled with people who’ve known one another for most of their lives. “Townies” are proud of their heritage and may intentionally or unintentionally ostracize those who haven’t lived there all their lives. Churches should want to help outsiders to fit in. In God’s Kingdom, there are no outsiders.

I served 25 years as an Army Chaplain, 20 as a civilian pastor. My wife felt more comfortable being an officer’s wife than a pastor’s wife. We were part of the military subculture. The Army has some unwritten expectations for spouses but at the same time they embrace all family members. It is part of the *esprit de corps*. When we retired from the Army and moved to New England, it was obvious in many ways that we weren’t from there. It was a difficult adjustment. In many ways, we were struggling to enter a closed system.

Pastors’ spouses often find themselves in a no-win situation. They need approval. They need friends. They need emotional support. They may need some financial support as well. Often churches do not provide adequate pay and benefits, and some pastors are struggling to make ends meet, living paycheck-to-paycheck. They can’t save much for retirement. They can’t afford many of the pleasures of life others in the community take for granted.

Preacher's kids may also have adjustment issues, growing pains, and emotional needs. When they arrive, they have just said goodbye to all their close friends. They aren't perfect, and churches should not expect them to be model Christians. How many children of Bible heroes turned out well? Not many. Don't blame the parents. There is such a thing as personal responsibility. Paul tells Timothy that pastors must manage their family well; "manage", not necessarily "convert." That is God's job. Parents can teach right from wrong but can't make moral choices for their children. They can pray for their children and take them to church, but they can't make them believe.

Sunday is a family day for most Christians. For clergy spouses it is a day of separation. My wife often told me how she was longing to sit with me in church when I finally retired from active ministry, when she no longer had to share me with the congregation. Because of the needs of the church, the pastor often has to work on holidays and even on scheduled days off due to unexpected crises.

Hospitality can place a burden on pastor's wives. It is a gift not everyone has. Many pastor's wives are expected to entertain and invite people from the congregation over for meals, especially if they are living in a parsonage. For many clergy, home is not a shelter from the demands of ministry. Pastors need to set boundaries to protect their families. When home, pastors are ministering to their families. Many pastors neglect their families because they are spending so much time helping others. I knew a minister whose teenage daughter called the church office to make an appointment to see her dad. Here's part of the problem: When pastors are home, they are often worn out and have little left to give.

Ministers are expected to be emotive, gregarious, engaging... and often have spouses who are quiet and reserved. Introverts are stimulated from within; they are reflective and prefer working alone; they are usually socially reserved; they feel drained and uncomfortable by social interaction. They're not "party-poopers";

they're “pooped by parties”. They are often misunderstood and labeled “shy,” yet shyness stems from insecurity, whereas introversion indicates a preference to process people, events, and emotions internally.

Or the pastor may be quiet and his wife is outgoing. She may overshadow her husband, be a driving force in the church and community... and make things difficult for the next pastor's wife who may not have the same personality.

Many church members expect the pastor's spouse to be a clone of the pastor. Opposites attract, and pastors have spouses who have differing views on social, political, and even biblical matters, and may even come from a different denomination altogether. I knew a Baptist minister whose wife was Roman Catholic. Marriage vows do not insist that couples agree all the time, but simply that husbands and wives give unconditional love.

A *Crosswalk* survey of clergy wives reveals several pressing needs:

- “I wish someone had told me to be myself.”
- “I wish I'd been better prepared to deal with criticism of my husband (and me).”
- “I wish I understood how much people were watching (and judging) us.”
- “I wish I had known how there can be some real mean people in the church.”
- “I wish I realized how much encouragement my husband needed.”
- “I wish I knew from the start how my schedule would never be normal.”

I learned as an Army Chaplain that in the military, some wives take on the rank of their spouses; they can become “Mrs. Commander” despite having no military authority. Some create a toxic environment. In the same way, some clergy wives want to take on the status of co-pastor. They assume responsibilities and expect to be in charge of various ministries within the church. They may experience some push-back from the congregation.

When a church hires a new pastor, it might be useful to ask their spouse the following questions:

- Are you fully on-board and supportive of your spouse's calling?
- Do you have your own separate calling with regard to a professional vocation?
- How do you envision your role as a pastor's spouse?
- What do you like and dislike about being a pastor's spouse?
- How do you see your involvement in our church?
- What can we do to help you?

Many clergy spouses suffer from discouragement, depression, and isolation. In the Army we have Chaplain Wives Groups, which are enormously helpful. My wife and I learned there aren't comparable support groups in the civilian world, which is very unfortunate.

Being a pastor's spouse can be a burden or a blessing. Congregations can help bring spouses on board with unconditional acceptance and loving support. The well-being of a pastor's spouse affects the overall life and health of the church.

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Performance Appraisals

Pastors need to know how they are doing in the performance of their job. A formal, verbal and written appraisal can help them to see what they have accomplished and where they need to improve. Prior to annual clergy evaluations, at the beginning of the evaluation period, Pastors are asked to prepare a statement of measurable goals (recognizing that not all that pastors do is quantifiable). These should include parish projects, professional training, sermon planning, community outreach, mentoring, publicity, etc. Monthly reports document specific ministry activities and significant

leadership accomplishments. The Pastor's job description should clearly state what the congregation expects. The point of this assessment is *accountability*.

At the end of the rating period pastors should report on objectives achieved, changes that would improve performance and productivity, desired training, retreats, and technical support, and what they've appreciated about their ministry the most and least.

Performance ratings:

E – Exceeds/Excels above and beyond objectives

S – Satisfactory, meets standards

IN – Improvement Needed; falls short of expectations

U – Unsatisfactory, fails to meet stated goals

Those participating in this appraisal may want to add some details to the following areas, more than simply listing a letter score, and may want to discuss in detail how the Pastor is handling the many tasks of ministry.

Ministry leadership responsibilities:

•Leading Worship ____

•Conduct of Ordinances—Communion, baptism, weddings, funerals ____

•Preaching—Balanced, Cross-centered, relevant proclamation of Scripture ____

(*Are there any issues/areas being neglected? Are the sermons too simplistic or too intellectual?)

•Seasonal (Lent, Advent) & special (weddings, funerals) services ____

•Community outreach/ministry of presence ____

•Ecumenical cooperation in a spirit of collegiality (clergy association) ____

•Administrative management and staff coordination/teamwork ____

- Denominational involvement in good standing ____
- Teaching (Bible studies, Confirmation, baptism/membership classes, etc) ____
- Participation in church boards and committees (Trustees, Outreach, Council, Deacons, etc) ____
- Mentoring of Associate Pastor and Seminarians ____
- Pastoral Care (shut-ins, hospitalized, counseling, home visitation) ____
- Publicity (media articles, “*Pastor’s Column*”, etc) ____
- Time management (scheduling, prioritizing of work) ____
 (*Is our pastor focusing on/spending time & energy on the right things?)
- Self-care and professional development ____
- Openness--accepts guidance, feedback, correction, accountability ____
- Safeguards privileged communication/confidentiality ____
- Ability to delegate tasks ____
- Resolves conflicts, is a good listener and mediator ____
- Articulates vision, inspiring motivated, committed followers of Christ ____
- Transparency--authentic and genuine in oral and written communication ____
- We are satisfied with the pastoral care we’re receiving ____
- Balances personal, family and ministry demands ____
- Communicates compassion to hurting people ____
- Makes visitors feel welcome ____
- Promotes harmony and inclusion, resolves conflicts and deals with problems compassionately ____
- Is personable and accessible/approachable ____

- No fear of clergy burnout ____
- Cultivates a healthy home life and pursues outside interests ____
- Models our core beliefs and mission ____
- Connects well with young and old ____
- Sets an example of high moral and ethical character ____
- Conveys/instills enthusiasm for church activities ____
- Inspires confidence ____
- Our Pastor has a Pastor and is a Pastor to fellow-clergy ____
- Communicates the church's vision ____
- Does not get sidetracked on matters that waste time and resources that are not integral to the mission of the church ____
- Organized, promotes excellence, sets high standards ____
- Reports on time and prepared for church meetings & activities ____
- Promotes new ideas for parish projects ____
- Has a plan for an upcoming sabbatical ____

Overall assessment... Looking back over the past year, what went well, what did not, and why? What is the Pastor not doing that he/she might consider doing... or doing that he/she should decrease, or stop? What do we appreciate most about our Pastor? How could we better assist/support our Pastor?

Clergy self-assessment

- List your major accomplishments during the past year.
- What goals did you fall short of achieving?

- What aspects of your ministry do you enjoy most...and least?
- Is anything hindering your effectiveness/productivity?
- How can the church help you personally & professionally?
- What goals do you aspire to for the following year?

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Layoffs

For various reasons, at times hired people have to go. Some depart on their own accord, but there will be times when some need to be laid off, hopefully in a gracious, loving way. As Pastor, you ought not be the sole individual who hires or fires people. That needs to be the decision of the Church Council, under the leadership of the Moderator (the titles will vary among churches, but you get the idea).

The usual reason for layoffs is financial; the church cannot maintain the position. Sometimes the position is eliminated because the duties are consolidated into one position, for example, youth and teens. Sometimes the position will need to be staffed with volunteers...and sometimes even volunteers need to be asked to step down.

Explain the reasons: limited finances, poor performance, change in vision. Offer some closure, a cash gift, and a memento expressing appreciation for their service. The closure ought to include a public statement in worship and prayer for the individual, followed by at least a cake at fellowship time, or possibly a church dinner.

In the case of poor performance as the reason for dismissal, it is critical to have a series of documented performance counseling sessions, anticipating that the layoff may be challenged.

Usually (but not always) the individual is a member of the church. They may be hurt, to the point where they may leave. This is unfortunate and unavoidable.

As pastor, you should offer to help the individual network to find another position, and assure them you will prepare letters of reference. In a secular business layoffs can be very impersonal and uncaring. The church is not a business, and layoffs need to be done in a way that communicates compassion.

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What pastors *can't* do

Adapted from churchleaders.com; the list--in boldface--is by Chuck Lawless, the comments are mine:

- **Read minds**—People expect us to anticipate their unstated expectations.
- **Be everywhere**—I had a commander who expected me to be accessible in my office *and* with the soldiers all the time.
- **Change hearts**—We can't convince people to believe; only the Holy Spirit can do that.
- **Know everything**—Only recent seminary graduates *know it all*. The older I get, the more I tend to live with mystery, with unanswered questions. People want compassion more than explanations.
- **Please everybody**—Many pastors want to be liked, and this can cause us to compromise our convictions.
- **Live sinlessly**—We model pilgrimage, not perfection. We're at best wounded healers.
- **Be upbeat all the time**—We get sad, depressed, anxious, frustrated, just like everyone else.
- **Grow the church**—This is God's task; pastors equip their congregations to do Kingdom-work. We sometimes *think* this is our responsibility.

- **Multiply dollars**—We're not fund-raisers.
- **Avoid favoritism**—To expect a pastor to not develop personal friendships within the church is unrealistic.
- **Ignore sin**—We shouldn't obsess over sin, but neither should we avoid it. There's the old critique, "You've stopped preaching; you're now meddling." Occasionally we need to meddle.

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Clinical Pastoral Care

The clinical setting is uniquely different from the local parish. A congregation which willingly participates in worship perceives the role of ministry differently from the patients and staff of a hospital. While a pastoral relationship is expected in a church setting, it often has to be introduced and often defended in an institutional environment. Industrial, military, and hospital chaplaincies may attain the status of tradition, yet clergy often find themselves having to explain their presence and persuade the system to allow them to function as a respected fellow-professional.

Some health care professionals resent clergy and perceive religion as a threat. An agnostic doctor in Tennessee told me, "I'm a good surgeon—I don't need ministers praying for me!" Some doctors think M.D. stands for "Medical Deity." Physicians may fear that clergy will undermine their patients' trust in health care by talk of faith. This is not entirely unfounded. Some Christians have been known to denigrate and discount medical treatment, claiming that faith alone will heal, and insist that reliance upon medical treatment is a sign of spiritual immaturity and weakness.

The Bible points out the finitude of human understanding and ability. Medical science is at best an imperfect craft; the fact that people die daily in hospitals is proof that medicine cannot save to the uttermost. Many doctors wrestle over their limitations and feel a profound sense of failure whenever a patient dies. They may

say they “lost” a patient, even though they did everything possible. When patients who seemingly should die miraculously recover, medical staff members shake their heads in amazement, knowing that the reversal was not due to their training and skill. In a very cynical novel, *The House of God*, interns are told that they will not heal anyone as doctors; the patients will heal on their own, in spite of their physicians' efforts. A surgeon at Walter Reed Army Medical Center confessed during a lecture to chaplains: “*I only treat illness--God does the healing.*” A 1992 study in *Newsweek* magazine revealed that prayer may indeed aid recovery. A group of patients with comparable medical problems were singled out and divided in half. One half received the benefit of prayer, and their recovery was remarkably better than the ones not prayed for. Is this coincidence or a demonstration of the efficacy of intercession? The omnipotence of God should be the measure of our expectations.

How the staff and patients of hospitals perceive ministry depends on how those ministered to have encountered ministry. If they have had positive experiences with clergy, they will welcome pastoral care. I had a doctor call on me to visit a patient who was not “spiritually ready” for surgery. This surgeon realized that it took more than his skill to bring about healing. I’ve had doctors who regarded me as a worthless interference. I kept out of their way.

Those who receive pastoral care see clergy and congregations through the lens of past experience. How they have encountered ministers will shape their perception of ministry. Childhood experiences, media preachers, and religious newsmakers all contribute to one's perception of ministry--good and bad. When entering a hospital room, how we are received depends on the patient's baggage. If they have had a good history of ministry, we are welcomed; if ministry has left a sour taste, we may be rejected. I sat down in a mess hall with an Army Corps of Engineers Major and introduced myself as the new Battalion Chaplain. He smirked and said, “So you're a chaplain? Let me tell you about some chaplains I've known.” The implication was

clearly negative. I managed a smile and replied, “OK, sir, and when you're finished, I'll tell you about some Engineers I've known.”

Hospitals, like any large institutions, can regress into impersonal machines. A fourth year medical student confessed that he struggled to remind himself that first and foremost, patients are human beings. Patients want to be heard. They have questions about their care, yet they often feel intimidated by the clinical professionalism of the health care team. Unanswered concerns fester within, adding to their anxiety. The abrupt, precise, and quick visits by physicians discourage needed ventilation of patients' fears. Listening skills are not always taught in medical school. Dr. Richard Selzer addressed this concern in a 1989 interview: “Science has become the religion of our time for a great many people. It is absolutely true that the development of medical technology has distanced the doctor from his patients. It is now entirely possible to take care of people without touching them, without listening to their lungs or heart. All a doctor has to do is run a battery of tests that are administered by technicians, read the results off the chart, and write a prescription. This process does away with the love between the doctor and patient that ought to exist.” Pastors and parishioners can make a difference in hospitals by encouraging patients to *name the demons* troubling them (voice their fears), by empowering them to claim a greater role in their treatment and, when necessary, by helping them confront the system to project greater responsiveness toward the human element of patient care.

A significant aspect of ministry is sharing God's love with those who are in pain. All ministers make hospital rounds, and most church members have at least visited sick relatives and friends. The unfamiliar turf of an imposing medical center with its unique language, uniformed staff, authoritarian regulations, serious demeanor, strange smells and myriads of confusing hallways (who hasn't gotten lost in a hospital?) can intimidate many who would like to appear confident and comfortable in this clinical subculture. The strangeness often keeps visitors away.

The clinical setting can be an alien, even hostile environment. Many people avoid hospitals at all cost, even to the neglect of their own health. Anxiety concerning illness and injury extends to the fear that one might “catch” something contagious. Hospitals force us to consider our mortality, a fact of life we'd rather not face. Yet hospitals are also places of joy. When people learn why they haven't been well, when healing takes place, and when new life emerges, hospitals become places of celebration. When death ends a prolonged period of suffering, the hospital is a haven of peace and relief. Because time often goes by slowly in a hospital room, the clinical setting is also a place of reflection and decision-making. It's not all bad. When we see how we can contribute to the healing process, hospitals can become for us places of providential encounters.

The Apostle James defines pure religion as visiting orphans and widows in their distress (1:27). He also encourages the elders of the church to pray with the sick, anointing them with oil in the Lord's name (5:14-15). Clergy and laity alike are directed to extend their discipleship to acts of mercy, in practical, relevant ways. Compassion may be felt toward others; this book is intended to show how compassion may be applied in caring for the sick. A medical degree is not required, only an understanding of some of the dynamics of illness along with a strategy for helping those who hurt.

A Contract for Wellness

I choose hope rather than despair; my illness doesn't rule or define me.

I choose this day to overcome emotional distress by defeating negativity, by sending my body a positive/affirming message, and by anchoring myself in the comfort of knowing that God's peace is my ultimate goal.

I ask God to:

- Eliminate illness in my body, mind and spirit.
- Make real in my life His highest potential for wholeness.
- Give me confidence in myself, my healthcare team, my treatment, and in Him.

I seek to:

- Practice gratitude for the blessings I now have.
- Spend time each day in prayer and reflection in Scripture, allowing myself to receive God's grace and guidance.
- Forgive others and remember they are forgiven and released from my anger and resentment.
- Be a channel of God's unconditional, compassionate love.
- Pursue God's will for my life as I understand it.
- Comfort others with the strength I've received from God.

End of Life Matters

Presuppositions...

- With sin, death entered the world. *"It is appointed unto man once to die."* No one gets off the planet alive. People die because of sin, which turned a garden into a grave.
- God is the Author of human life. All humankind is formed in God's image, though marred by sin, and each has unique dignity and worth. Therefore we affirm the particular sanctity of human life.
- Pastoral care has been defined as preparing people for "a good death." Death is a spiritual event--a journey that needs preparation. People need to know how to die and where they are going on this journey. Someone facing death said, "I always showed my family how to live. Now I'm going to show them how to die."

- An elderly man who appeared near death asked a minister to pray for him. The minister asked, “Why do you want to live longer?” Is death seen as an enemy, and should we live, what are our goals, our purpose for being here?

Scriptural support

- Psalm 116:15, “Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His saints.”
- Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Death is a *promotion*)
- 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

The principle of Autonomy

*“What sort of death should a Christian want, and how does one die, properly, as a Christian?” (Robb Moll, *The Art of Dying*).*

Patient’ wishes and convictions about death counts; the decisions are not made for them, apart from their input.

Medical personnel and bio-ethicists largely agree that patients have the right to *share* in the decision-making process, the right to “have a say,” to make choices regarding their healthcare, to include the right to decline treatment. In the past, doctors made all medical decisions unilaterally (“*therapeutic privilege*”), as the patient was

considered incapable of contributing to the process, and it was deemed proper to withhold information regarding a patient's impending death.

In the past, doctors have withheld information to spare patients the pain of knowing their true medical condition. This they deemed an act of kindness. Yet was it kindness to withhold such information? This attitude is passing.

Then there are concerns over patient competency. Questions include:

- Is the patient able to render an informed decision?
- What influence is the stress/anxiety of the illness having on the decision?
- Why is the patient choosing to disregard physicians' recommendations?

The Principle of Disclosure/Informed Consent

Patients have a right to know what they are facing. The former policy of non-disclosure did much damage and undermined the patient-physician relationship. It eroded trust. Patients now have the right to make a willing and un-coerced acceptance of a medical intervention (procedure) after adequate disclosure of:

- The patient's current medical condition/nature of their illness, with a minimum of technical, medical jargon, to include all symptoms.
- The likely course/natural prognosis if no treatment is provided (if nothing is done, which is an option), how often it may occur and what may cause a recurrence.
- The treatment options/procedures that might improve the patient's condition and a description of all options.
- Whether the condition appears medically reversible and to what extent health can be restored. In other words, the probability of success.
- The possible results and risks of examinations, tests, and procedures.
- What to expect from medication, to include any side-effects.
- The right to refuse treatment.

- Imminent death—to be fully informed when the end is near, when a condition is not medically survivable, to give patients time to prepare for their departure. The moral values of patients are to be respected and their wishes regarding end-of-life matters honored by their medical professionals.

Knowing the choices and granting the option of deciding what is best for them, patients establish a partnership with the healthcare team, thereby taking responsibility for their wellness, and not simply being passive (*“Here I am, fix me”*).

The principle of Non-maleficence

The Hippocratic Oath states: *“Above all, do no harm.”* The imperative to prevent and remove harm, pain, injury. The challenge doctors face is: What to do when a condition can’t be “fixed.”

The principle of Beneficence

An obligation to promote good and present positive benefits. This includes a comfortable death, as much as is reasonable and possible, with palliative care to minimize suffering.

The principle of Distributive Justice

The fair and equal provision of benefits according to individual need.

The right to confidentiality and privacy

Patients alone have the right to know their medical condition. An exception is when a condition puts others at risk. For example, when it is discovered that one has a genetic disorder, other family members have the right to know they may be at risk. At times in protecting others, medical personnel have the duty to override confidentiality.

With the implementation of the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act's (HIPAA) privacy laws, it is harder to know if someone is hospitalized. Tell your congregation that when they are hospitalized to request that you are to be informed; otherwise some hospitals will refuse to disclose that they are there. I've announced from the pulpit: "If you're the tenth person to tell me someone is in the hospital, I'll thank you. I'd rather hear this ten times than not at all."

Advanced Medical Directives...

Death today often does not come until the patient, or his/her family members, make a choice to allow it. There is always something more that can be done. Advanced Medical Directives are legally sanctioned procedures allowing patients to exercise their right of choice with regard to the use of heroic measures should they become irreversibly terminally ill or be in a persistent vegetative state.

-For example... The wife of a terminally ill patient was told that with various means the medical team could keep her husband's body alive for two to three more weeks. When the wife asked the doctor what benefits this would provide, whether her husband would regain consciousness, and whether his quality of life might improve, the answers were "no." So *why do it?* "Because we can" was the answer. "*Can do*" does not necessarily mean "*should do*."

A hospital can be an obstacle to dying well, when medicine turns death into a nightmare of suffering, when doctors don't know when to stop, and their efforts only delay the inevitable at any cost. This does far more than patients want, thus adding to the trauma of an already distressful event. Thanks to the wonders of modern medicine doctors are able to prolong dying, not life.

Clarification—There is a major difference between killing a patient and letting a patient die:

- **Active Euthanasia** is a procedure that deliberately ends life through administering lethal drugs, called physician-assisted suicide or so called “mercy killing.” This is promoted by the Hemlock Society, *Final Exit* by Derek Humphry and the late Dr. Kevorkian. Elderly people in the Netherlands are so fearful of being killed by doctors that they carry cards saying they do not want euthanasia.
- **Passive Euthanasia** is the withdrawing or withholding of extraordinary medical means of little utility. Particularly in cases where recovery is not possible, where death is imminent and irreversible, and further treatment is pointless. The medical team lets nature take its course, and patients are given comfort-care.

Some people list *quality-of-life* as a factor in their Advanced Medical Directive. This is a gray area; how it is defined varies and should not be a factor in end-of-life decisions.

End-of Life options:

Where would you like to die? In a hospital, nursing home, your own home, or a hospice? How much do you want the doctors to do for you when you are near death? A conversation isn’t enough; you need to document your desires regarding end-of-life treatment. There are 3 documents available to make your wishes known...

1. Living Wills—most states allow for a “living will” that expresses in great detail the wishes of patients nearing the end of life. Such a document allows an individual to outline the medical decisions they wish in the event that the time comes when they cannot speak for themselves. Such documents should be updated every five years in order to reflect one’s current thinking. This helps patients to clarify what’s important to them and the treatment options they want and don’t want. In most states this is binding.

Living wills usually involve decisions about:

- **DNR**--a “do not resuscitate” order stating whether or not the patient wishes CPR when his/her heart or breathing stops. At this point, providing comfort-care and pain control become the goals, not treatment or testing.
- **DNI**--a “do not intubate” order, prohibiting the use of a breathing tube and ventilator.
- **DNH**--“do not hospitalize”, an directive often utilized by nursing home patients.
- **Feeding tube**--whether to allow artificial hydration and nutrition when the patient is no longer able to take food or fluid by mouth. The body is trying to shut down, and a feeding tube distracts and interferes with this process. Choosing not to force-feed a person is choosing not to prolong the natural dying process.
- **Organ donation**, which some Christians have problems with, while others view it as an act of compassion, even specifying that they wish it known that they are giving their organs in Christ’s Name.

Living wills express whether one wants extraordinary means/heroic measures taken, particularly when there is no reasonable expectation of recovery. The point is to reduce medical intervention and to let God be God, allowing the patient to die naturally. Is continued aggressive treatment really best for the patient?

A family member was asked long after her loved one died, “Did you have any regrets in your decision to withdraw treatment?” She responded immediately, “Yes. I regret that we did not withdraw treatment sooner.”

We can be very specific, listing special provisions, whether we wish certain treatments, tests, transfusions, chemotherapy, pain meds, surgery, or put on a ventilator. A common element is the DNR/“comfort-care only” order. The document should be signed, dated and witnessed by two persons who are not related by blood or marriage.

A popular, thorough Living Will accepted by most states is *Five Wishes*, available from Aging With Dignity, P.O. Box 1661, Tallahassee FL 32302 www.agingwithdignity.org

2. Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care, aka Medical Proxy... this document allows the patient to name another person to make medical decisions for them in the event that they are unable to express their wishes (coma, persistent vegetative state). The person named is the patient's advocate and has the right of access to the patient's medical records. This person can consent to and then stop treatment if the patient's condition does not improve.

The agent/proxy should be 18 or older, someone the patient trusts and who knows the patient well enough to understand his or her wishes.

3. Physician's Order for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST). This lists a patient's choices for medical treatment issues, such as feeding tubes and the use of antibiotics (not accepted/used in all states).

How to Pray...

In his book *Healing Words*, Dr. Larry Dossey advises prayer as an integral part of a patient's treatment. He jokingly suggests patients should sue their doctors for malpractice if they fail to pray for them! Dossey admits he often doesn't know what to ask for, and so he often prays for "*the best possible outcome.*" And when the patient dies, this may well be what's best for them.

In life, and in death, we rest in the compassionate providence of God.

What to expect in assisting the dying...

- Withdrawal/detachment--preparation for release, "letting go." Let them know this is OK
- Vision-like experiences, of loved ones or close friends who've long died.

- Decreased socialization--he/she may wish to be with only a select few people.
- Unusual communication, out-of-character/illogical statements, disorientation.
- Sometimes a restless burst of energy near the very end of life.

“Death is often brutal, but death does not win.” –Madeline L’Engle

Visiting the Sick

- Call first, to be sure you’re coming at a good time, otherwise you may be waiting for the patient to finish up a physical therapy session or return from tests.
- Stop at the nurse’s station to let the staff know who you are and what church you represent and to make certain it is a good time to visit, especially if the patient’s door is closed. This may also help prevent interruptions.
- Use sanitizer to protect yourself, and to protect the patient from any germs you might have. Don’t visit if you are sick.
- Limit your visit to about 15-20 minutes, unless the patient wishes a longer visit.
- Bring a magazine or book; hospital stays can be boring, and most patients will appreciate something to read. Share a Sunday worship bulletin.
- Have a seat so the patient doesn’t have to awkwardly look up at you.
- Be yourself, be authentic; avoid false optimism or grim seriousness. Don’t dismiss their negativity, worries or fears. Some distress is understandable.
- To know one’s condition is not necessarily to accept it.
- Don’t minimize their condition. Definition of “minor surgery”: surgery on someone else.
- If the patient requests something (food, water, to be moved), check with the nurse’s station first.

- There is no standard approach, and you do not know how they feel.
- Respect the value of silence, of simply being a caring presence.
- Don't ask why they're there... it could be something they'd rather not talk about. Simply ask, "How is it with you?" It's OK to ask how long they think they'll be hospitalized. Don't pry into their privacy. There may actually be something more pressing on their minds they'd prefer to discuss.
- Encourage confidence in self, the medical team, the treatment, and in God.
- Mark Twain said there are 3 kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics. The odds may not be in our favor, but there's nothing wrong with hope. This is not denial but defiance.
- The "difficult" patients are often fighters who survive.
- Get to know the Hospital Chaplain.
- If they have complaints about their care, ask if they've contacted the Patient Representative, Ombudsman, or Chaplain.
- Laughter is therapeutic, so don't hesitate to share something amusing, unless the patient appears deeply depressed.
- Doctors devote their energies towards the disease or injury; focus on the person.
- Music is therapeutic, if you play an instrument, bring it along (no bagpipes, however).
- Touch is therapeutic; hold the patient's hand when you pray.
- Compassion is sharing the hurt of others and seeking ways to bring relief to their suffering.
- Comment on their flowers, photos, cards, gifts.
- Read a few verses of appropriate Scripture.
- Ask permission to share their condition with praying friends; respect their right to privacy.

- Before you depart, ask if you can offer a prayer. A patient said, “Prayer works, chemo works... I use both!” Pray for the best possible outcome, and then leave the results to God.

Eugene Peterson tells a story of a relative who was hospitalized. While visiting her, a minister came in, spoke for several minutes in “preacher clichés,” prayed and left. Peterson turned to his relative in the hospital bed and said, “I hope I’ve never done that to anyone.” We need to be real, authentic.

Anointing with oil

Some Protestant clergy are reluctant to anoint the sick and dying, regarding it as “too Catholic”. Yet anointing with oil is commanded in Scripture, and provides a comfort for those receiving it. Here are two sample liturgies for the sick and those near death...

Anointing with oil • the Ordinance of the Sick

Introduction: We gather in the Name of our loving Lord, who is with us always. To be anointed with oil at times of sickness is to recall our baptism and to remember that we belong to God, who watches over us. James 5:14, *“Are any of you sick? Then call the elders of the church to pray and anoint with oil in the Name of the Lord.”* Let us pray...

Invocation: Almighty God, our creator and sustainer, grant peace and wholeness to _____, and restore *him/her* to health. Bring Your light to this time of testing and pain. Only in You do we find wholeness and restoration. You alone are our endless hope, strength and salvation. We anoint with oil; anoint with Your Spirit, and bring Your peace; in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture reading: Psalm 121, “I lift up my eyes to the mountains--where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. He

will not let your foot slip--He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm--He will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."

Blessing of the oil: Lord of all Compassion, graciously listen to our prayer of faith. Bless this oil, from the abundance of the earth, and sanctify it for our use. Send the unfailing power of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, to raise up Your servant, according to Your mercy, in Your strong and mighty Name, Amen.

Anointing: *Make the sign of the cross with olive oil upon the individual's forehead, in the Threefold Name, then with laying on of hands pray...*

Prayer of anointing: Refuge for every wounded heart, send now Your Holy Spirit that _____, anointed with oil, may in faith be made whole. Look with compassion upon Your servant and deliver *him/her* from every affliction of body and soul. Take *him/her* from fear to faith. Great Physician, grace this holy ritual with Your redemptive presence, and bring healing, by the power and in the Name of Christ our Savior, Who has taught us to pray, saying (*Lord's Prayer*).

Benediction: Numbers 6, the *Barocha*, spoken or sung: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and give you peace, forever."

Anointing with oil • at the time of death

We gather in the Name of our loving Lord, who is with us always. To be anointed with oil when we are nearing the end of our days is to recall our baptism and to remember that we belong to God. Pastor Tim Keller states: "All death can do for us is to make our lives infinitely better."

Invocation: Healer of our souls, look upon _____, lying in great weakness, and comfort him/her with the promise of life everlasting, secured by the death and resurrection of Christ our Lord. Going to our eternal home is to be embraced, not feared, for death is not the end of our lives. There are better things ahead than anything we leave behind. _____ is still in the land of the dying, but will soon be in the land of the living, where there are no tears, no sorrow, and no pain. We couldn't ask for a better outcome. We rest in Your love; in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Scripture reading: *1 Peter 1:3-5*, "All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and has reserved for us a priceless inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. It is kept in Heaven for us, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see." *The word of the Lord.*

A prayer for the dying: "Dear Lord, bring _____ through darkness into light. Bring him/her through pain into peace. Bring him/her through death into life. Be with _____, and with everyone he/she loves. In Christ's Name, Amen."

Blessing of the oil: Lord of all Compassion, graciously listen to our prayer of faith. Bless this oil, from the abundance of the earth, and sanctify it for our use. Send the compassion of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, to give courage to Your servant, according to Your mercy. We can smile on death because our Savior smiles on us. We pray in His strong and mighty Name.

Anointing: *Make the sign of the cross with olive oil upon the individual's forehead, then with laying on of hands pray...*

Prayer of anointing: Refuge for every wounded heart, send now Your Holy Spirit that _____, anointed with oil, may look forward to waking to a new existence, a

new life where all our tears are wiped away. Guide _____ in this sacred journey toward the dawn of a new and glorious day. All death can do is make our lives infinitely better. Good Shepherd, lead us through the dark valley so that we may dwell in Your house forever. This we ask in the compassionate Name of Jesus, Who has taught us to pray, saying (*Lord's Prayer*).

Benediction: “Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of His glory with rejoicing; to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all time and now and forevermore, Amen” (Jude 24-25).

In addition to anointing, you may wish to offer to give Holy Communion.

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Senior Ministry

In 2020 a church made headlines by telling its seniors to go away so they could attract a younger crowd. Their tactic was hardly applauded by the larger Body of Christ. In a church where I served as advisor to the pastor search committee, we discussed the advantages of having a younger pastor, and some expressed concern that seniors might be neglected by a young minister. One more illustration: After my retirement, my wife and I visited area churches for a new church home. One was predominantly a young crowd, and while I was hardly aged, I didn't relish being the oldest person in the congregation.

Most churches have some kind of senior ministry. Many senior church groups have cute names (e.g. Elderberries, Jolly Elders, Seasoned Saints, etc), but do they *need* a name? Older people are simply people, at different stages of growth.

Churches need handicap accessibility for seniors: ground floor meeting places, wheelchair space in sanctuaries, grab bars in restrooms, wider aisles, hearing devices.

Churches should consider having a Senior Adult Director as a full or part-time ministry, perhaps a retired minister. Consider a senior outreach in your community. Most towns have a Senior Center, where you can have lunch and attend classes. I conducted a Bible Study for seniors for 17 years, and most of those attending were not members of my church. It was one of the most successful ventures of my career.

Ministries for older adults might include:

- A team to periodically checks on frail elderly, offering to do minor repairs or provide transportation.
- Reading to homebound seniors.
- Helping seniors prepare complicated Medicare forms.
- Hospital/nursing home visitation group.
- A handicap accessible facility.
- Senior Sunday School class
- Low-impact exercise program
- Social services/resources--provide references and referrals to seniors concerning area agencies that may help them in their needs.
- Social activities--shopping trips, concerts, sightseeing trips, etc.
- Eucharistic committee--to set up communion and to take Communion to homebound persons.
- Christian retiree magazines available in the church library.
- Bereavement ministry for those suffering loss.
- Financial counsel--help for those living on retirement income to include budgeting, money management, senior discounts and investment advice. Billionaire Warren Buffett was quoted as saying that when it came to leaving

children money, the goal is “just enough so that they would feel that they could do anything, but not so much that they would feel like doing nothing.”

- Seminars for Seniors:
 - Advanced Medical Directives/living wills
 - What to tell/ask Your Doctor
 - Financial planning/retirement income
 - Bereavement
 - Legal issues (led by an elder law attorney)
 - How to be an effective Grandparent
 - How to be a long-distance Grandparent
 - Safety concerns—home security, avoiding scams, etc.

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Nursing Home Ministry

A confession: This has been the hardest aspect of pastoral ministry for me. I know a chaplain whose entire ministry is with nursing homes, and he finds it enormously satisfying. I find it depressing, visiting people who are waiting to die. I think it is even more difficult than hospice work. And I was the chaplain for the Burn Ward at an Army hospital—very challenging, but at least I was dealing with people who were working towards returning to life. After conducting a nursing home service I needed to go to a coffee shop and recover. I realize that’s my problem, and maybe not yours, but be prepared for an experience that may be difficult to process. Here are some suggestions...

- Work with staff to get residents to attend services, but no one should feel coerced.
- Music should be played slower and in a lower key; mostly older hymns and choruses are best loved.

- Ensure that staff members will attend in case a resident becomes ill or agitated.
- Avoid preaching on topics that have little meaning to people who are in their last years.
- Keep it simple... be sure you have a clear point to make in your message. Keep the message uncluttered with details and stick to the point.
- Be brief—a 10 minute sermon is the most residents can handle.
- Touch on the familiar whenever possible—Bible stories, old hymns, the Lord's Prayer, the Doxology.
- Expect interruptions and be flexible.
- Speak loudly, slowly, and clearly.
- Encourage residents' involvement with message by asking questions.
- Pray for the residents and their family members.
- When the service is over, shake hands with all residents and be prepared to pray for individuals. Do not be in a hurry to leave.

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Prison Ministry

I served as chaplain of a military confinement facility and often escorted prisoners to Fort Leavenworth's Disciplinary Barracks (prison). As a civilian pastor I have visited inmates in state penitentiaries. During one visit, a prisoner pointed out to me at the next table in the visiting room their "celebrity", James Earl Ray. Some tips...

- Research the prison system and culture. Consult with prison chaplains and social workers for guidance.
- Find out what you are permitted to give prisoners by way of religious articles and literature.
- In visiting individual prisoners, do not ask why they're there, and make no promises to bring articles or contact people for them.

- The cadre also have needs in this high-stress environment.

Characteristics of prisoners

- A compressed, controlled life
- Isolation, limited solitude, abandonment
- Boredom and loneliness
- Disgrace/shame
- Fear and apprehension
- Emotionally vulnerable
- Time to ponder the ultimate questions, the human condition, their own identity, and how to reconstruct their life
- Manipulation—inmates often do whatever they think pleases those who take an interest in them, to use them.
- Institutionalization—which can hinder reintegration into society and cause recidivism.
- Struggle--much of prison life is counter-productive to spiritual growth.
- Hopelessness and despair

What to offer:

- Worship services
- Therapy groups
- Bible studies
- Prayer meetings
- Literature distribution
- Marriage enrichment to mend the broken bond
- Ministry to family members
- Mentoring
- **Hope**



Bi-vocational Pastors

Many churches are unable to hire a full-time minister, so out of necessity more and more clergy are bi-vocational. Some are retired clergy who have a pension, but most have a full-time job and serve a church with what time is left. For their church work they are “partially compensated.” No pastor should feel compelled to embrace a vow of poverty by serving full-time for a part-time salary and inadequate benefits. Some bi-vocational pastors are also professional counselors, hospital chaplains, or seminary professors. Some work in secular professions. Their time commitment is similar to that of Interim Pastors. This isn’t ideal, but there is a biblical precedent, that of the Apostle Paul, a tentmaker. Paul points out how pastors need to be adequately provided for, so his practice does not serve an example for all.

Pastors have the right of support, but some choose to be bi-vocational. I knew a retired Army Chief of Chaplains who told his Methodist bishop, “Send me to a church that can’t afford a pastor.” Those who have a secular job may feel conflicted; they can’t give their church their “all.” This is not a second-class ministry; it is a significant ministry, often more challenging than that of fully-funded pastors, the so-called standard model of ministry. Those engaged in this find ways of bringing ministry to both occupations. They are ministers every day, in both the parish and the secular world. Some denominations have bi-vocational ministry consultants to provide guidance to those with two unique sets of demands and stresses.

Bi-vocational ministry limits how much the pastor can do and thus requires the congregation to participate more fully in sharing the work of ministry. The congregation may become more highly invested in furthering the success of the church; the success is obviously not on the shoulders of their pastor. This is a change for the better.

As organizations downsize, workers find themselves doing more with less with no increase in pay. A bi-vocational minister needs to do some triage and prioritize what tasks are essential and non-essential. Working with the parish council, they need to know what is expected. Working together, they may consider some “what-if” scenarios and determine who is responsible for them. The council may have to take ownership of some things a full-time pastor would normally handle. They need to adapt to the situation and remain flexible.

Most full-time pastors are engaged in local Clergy Associations, denominational meetings, and professional growth study groups. Some join civic organizations to extend their community influence. Bi-vocational pastors don’t have the luxury of these “extras” and may have to decline, hopefully without guilt. They need to know when to say no.

Similar to bi-vocational ministry is “Circuit Riding”, an old Methodist term referring to congregations sharing a pastor. This has become a necessity when churches are too small to provide support or because of a clergy shortage. Between them they are able to support a minister, but, as with bi-vocational pastors, the congregations do not enjoy their pastor’s exclusive attention. While less-than-ideal, this nonetheless reminds the parish that they--not the pastor--are the church.

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Pastoral Personalities

We often picture clergy as high-energy and outgoing. But is there an ideal pastoral personality? Is there room for diversity? If we pastors were all alike, there could well be some unpleasant consequences. How tolerable would the church be if every minister was a perfectionist, if every one was independent, artistic, emotive, “bottom-line”, fill in the blank ?

There are 4 functions of personality:

- How people and events/internal & external stimuli affect our energy level
- How we take in and respond to information & ideas
- How emotions and logic affect decision-making
- How we appraise and observe people and events

Here are the basic differences between extroverts and introverts:

Extroverts

Extroverts are energized/stimulated by the environment, the outer world of people and events. A high-scoring extrovert has trouble being quiet and is uncomfortable with silence and solitude. Extroverts are not merely sociable; they *need* relationships. They find it easy to express themselves verbally, even to strangers, maybe too much. They appear to have good inter-personal skills. An extrovert at a low energy level who has to interact with people, e.g. teach a class, will become enlivened. They tend to be *action-oriented*. Negatively, extroverts often take too little time to reflect before taking action, are impatient, and may speak too much ("Help--I'm talking and I can't shut up!").

Introverts

Introverts are stimulated from within; they are quiet, reflective and prefer working alone; they are usually socially reserved, and feel drained/uncomfortable by social interaction (They're not "party-poopers"; they're "pooped by parties"). They dislike interruptions, and place a high value on silence, space, and solitude. They are often misunderstood and labeled "shy"--yet shyness comes from insecurity, whereas introversion indicates a preference to process people and events internally. They tend to hold in their emotions. Being reflective, they are able to stay on task and patiently conduct extensive research. Introverts tend to be *process oriented*. This may be seen in a reticence to respond immediately to questioning. Negatively, introverts may appear withdrawn, reserved, slow to act, and secretive.

At a Chaplain training conference I attended, the group leader selected 4 introverts and 4 extroverts, and then assigned them a task that involved some brainstorming: “List some ministry ideas that have been effective.” The 4 introverts immediately pushed their chairs away to obtain more personal space, then seemed hesitant to “break the ice”, hesitated, then (finally) reluctantly offered a few ideas; they seemed relieved then the time was up. When asked if they were uncomfortable with the long pauses and silence, they said no; they were thinking about the task. The extroverts grabbed their chairs, moved close together, knees touching, then proceeded to interrupt each other with ideas and didn't want to stop when the exercise was done! They were heavily invested in the task, though we were only interested in the process, and they were upset to find this out!

Can introverted pastors be effective? Certainly. It may take more effort on their part, but they can be calm, quiet, confident leaders.

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The Diaconate

Biblical Justification

Jesus defined leadership as **service**: “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). This applies to all involved in Christian ministry. The word deacon (διακονος) means service. The word is often used to describe the work of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. The pattern of the diaconate is Jesus. The entire Christian life is participation by grace in the Servant-hood of God the Son. The diaconate is an essential aspect of every definition of ministry.

Church leadership is affirmed by an inner call and outer verification by the church.

Acts 6 and I Timothy 3 show how and why deacons were selected, along with their qualifications. The Apostles instituted this office, which functions as an arm of pastoral ministry for the local church.

Standards for deacons, according to Acts and the Pastoral Epistles, include:

- Worthy of Respect
- Temperate
- Individuals with spiritual depth
- Solidly Ethical in all dealings
- Spirit-filled
- Sincere
- Models of Christian Discipleship
- Proven Integrity
- Firm grasp of doctrine

Women and the Diaconate

The New Testament refers to women as full participants in ministry, fellow-laborers among the leadership of the early church. Biblical examples of diaconal ministry include Phoebe, Priscilla, Tryphaena, among others.

Diaconal Responsibilities

The Church Deacons are responsible in the following areas of ministry:

Administration

- Attend meetings of the Board.
- Assist in long and short-range planning process for the church.
- Raise matters of importance and cases of need before the Board.
- Examine and recommend individuals for church membership.
- The practical tasks of running the church. Deacons explore ways to be *ministry enablers*.

- Help pastors to define their duties and manage time effectively.
- Promote the ministries of the church through appropriate publicity.
- Ensure that the pulpit is supplied in the absence of the pastor.
- Coordinate with the pulpit search committee.

Worship

- Ensure that services and ordinances of the church are observed with regularity and reverence.
- Attend worship regularly and support the ministries of the church.
- Assist in leading the worship as needed/requested by the pastor.
- Coordinate between the music director for worship music and special events.
- Encourage the development of worship and worshippers by appraising the order of the weekly service and by assisting in the planning of special/seasonal observances.
- Help prepare, serve, and clean-up for the Ordinance of Holy Communion.
- Assist the Pastor in the conduct of Baptisms; present the parents with a flower, book and certificate, and insure the ordinance is officially recorded.

Ministry

- Set a Biblical example of faith and practice, demonstrating the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ in all actions.
- Devotional life—consistency in personal Bible study and intercessory prayer.
- Participate in visitation of the sick and shut-in; practice hospitality.
- Oversee the social needs ministries of the church, especially the needs of the poor.
- Serve on one of the Board's ministry positions (e.g. literature, ushers, visitation, food pantry, etc. and/or local parachurch organizations)
- Organizes and oversees the church prayer chain
- Supervise the flower ministry—for worship, seasonal services, and shut-ins.

- Available for counseling and encouragement of church members.
- Actively involved in personal evangelism/faith-sharing
- Set personal spiritual growth goals & objectives

Church Membership

- Examine the fitness of all applications by letter, confession or reaffirmation of faith for church membership and associate membership.
- Prepare membership ceremony in conjunction with Communion observance.
- Make annual reviews of the roll making special note of inactive members.

Fellowship

- Plan and facilitate fellowship activities for the church.
- Encourage & support small growth group fellowships (prayer groups, home Bible studies, dinner groups, etc.)
- Greet newcomers to the church and community; helping people feel comfortable and welcome.
- In the absence of the Pastor, a member of the Deacon Board will serve as liaison/representative to the Clergy Association.

Chair of the Deacon Board

- Calls and conducts all Board meetings, preparing the monthly agenda.
- Coordinates with the Pastor and other Church Boards.
- Acts as the Board's official representative and spokesperson/point-of-contact between meetings.
- Serves as contact person in case of emergencies or in the absence of the Pastor.

Secretary

- Takes minutes of all Board meetings
- Safeguards the Board's records

- Responsible for all Board correspondence
- Assumes the Chairperson's responsibilities in that individual's absence
- Prepares the Board's Annual Report

Treasurer

- Receives and dispenses funds for approved expenditures
- Keeps the Board's financial records
- Coordinate with the Pastor, Church Treasurer, Finance Committee, and Trustees, as necessary.

Spiritual Gifts and Diaconal Ministry

Definition—spiritual gifts are special abilities of God's grace given by the Holy Spirit for use within the Body of Christ, from the word charisma, meaning "grace gift" (Romans 6:23). While there are many spiritual gifts, the following are ones especially suitable for those engaged in diaconal ministry:

Administration: One who understands clearly the immediate and long-range goals of one's church; able to devise institute and execute effective plans for the accomplishment of these goals.

Leadership: Able to set goals in accordance with God's purpose and to communicate these goals to others in such a way that motivated followers voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish these goals for the glory of God.

Service: Willing and able to identify unmet needs and concerns and make use of available resources to meet those needs. The Board supports community service projects and ecumenical worship events.

Giving: One who freely contributes material resources, time and talent, to the work of the Lord with liberality and cheerfulness. Self-giving stewardship includes a willingness to be used by God. The Board maintains a discretionary benevolence fund.

Protection: The Board has established a church policy on the prevention and reporting of child sexual abuse, maintains and amends this policy and oversees its implementation.

Wisdom: Possesses spiritual insight and discernment into how given knowledge may best be applied to specific needs arising in the church.

Hospitality: Provides open home and warm welcome for those in need. The Deacon Board spearheads the church collation committee.

“We should use whatever gift we have received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).

Deacon Member-Care Ministry

In many churches the Deaconate (or Board of Elders) provides compassionate outreach to members of the congregation. *Compassion* is sharing the hurt of others and seeking to bring relief to their suffering. It begins with an awareness of distress and results in a plan of action to alleviate the hurt.

How Member Care works...

The church roster is divided by the number of Deacons. Each Deacon is assigned a partial list of church families (Some churches call this the “flock”). They are responsible for the care of all people on their list, including unmarried adult children and elderly relatives living with the family. Teens who have completed Confirmation could be assigned their own Deacon, often the youngest or most youth-oriented Deacon.

If a need arises in a family on your list, you are responsible for seeing that the need is addressed and that the family is supported by the prayers and resources of our church family. If you hear of a need in a family that is not on your list, contact the Member Care Ministry coordinator so that the Deacon for that family can be notified.

In some instances you may need to contact the Stephen's Ministry coordinator as well. In severe matters, at your discretion, contact the Pastor.

Ways to start and maintain contact with your Member Care families...

- Send an introductory note, for example: "I'm very pleased to be your Member Care Deacon for the coming year. If you have a prayer request, a personal concern or need that the Deacons could address, please call me. My phone number and email are _____. I will keep you and your family in my prayers".
- Introduce yourself to them in church, at coffee fellowship, or at a church event.
- Keep confidential notes about their interests and needs, for your ongoing reference.
- Call each family at least 4 times a year/quarterly. Always end with a word of encouragement to see them in church. Occasionally send a friendly email or text message.
- Invite them to join you in a Bible Study group or other church activity.
- Introduce them to people involved in church ministries and activities that may be of particular interest to them.
- Send notes or emails marking joyous occasions--birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, etc. as well as holiday greetings.

How to stay informed...

- Read the church newsletter and the prayer concerns in the weekly worship bulletins.

- Read newspapers, looking for announcements, obituaries and community events.
- Share needs, prayer concerns and good news about families you know personally with other Deacons at meetings, by phone or by email.
- Keep the Prayer Chain list and Church Directory by your telephone.

What to do when a need arises with one of your Member Care Families...

- Call and inquire about ways you and the Deaconate can help.
- Before making a visit, call to see if that's OK; the person may not want a visit.
- Have a working-knowledge about all of the church's ministries and resources so you can make suggestions.
- Learn to be a good listener. Listen uncritically to memories, joys, and sorrows, frustrations, happy and sad feelings.
- Listen *responsively*—Check out what you've heard and ask for clarification. You may need to work at *rephrasing* or *translating* what is said.
- Communication is going beyond what is *said* to what is *meant*. Stay dialogical and focused.
- Keep personal matters confidential unless they agree others need to know.
“Is it OK to tell our Pastor about your issue/concern?”
- Follow up your calls with a note/email whether help is requested or not.
- Pray, and activate the *Prayer Chain*, with the permission of the family.
- Contact the Church Office to add a concern to the prayer list in the worship bulletin. Let the office know when to *delete* someone from the list as well.
- Contact the Pastor, who may need to get involved; don't assume the Pastor knows of the need.

- Activate support from any group that the person or family may belong to--a Bible Study or board, women's fellowship, choir, etc.
- Promptly contact any other Deacon ministry to provide whatever is needed: cards, visitation, benevolence, Food Pantry, etc.
- The Pastor and Church Office have a Social Services Directory which can be utilized to make necessary referrals (They can email you a copy).
- For shut-ins, find out if they would like to receive Communion. You can arrange a time to go with the Pastor to help serve them.
- There will be times when it is appropriate to visit with your spouse or a friend.
- Widows may have special needs for life-care support, practical matters (home repair, transportation) as well as issues of alienation/loneliness. The Bible is emphatic about providing assistance to widows.

(Visiting the sick; guidelines for hospital visits... see the section on Clinical Care)

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Missions

Most evangelical churches support foreign missions and local para-church ministries, and engage in some direct forms of outreach in carrying out the Great Commission (Matthew 28). At a church I served a sign was posted by the exit: *“You are now entering the mission field.”*

A typical church mission board has a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, and several participating members. Most board members serve a limited term and have monthly meetings.

The functions of a mission board:

- **Education**—through literature, displays, guest speakers, projects, short-term mission trips, and monthly “Missions Moments” in the worship service focusing on a particular ministry. Churches challenge their people to consider the call to missionary work. Pastors occasionally preach on missions or about the life of a particular missionary.
- **Prayer**—for the specific needs mentioned in their prayer-letters (more on this below).
- **Contact**—they read newsletters, write letters, meet with missionaries seeking support, and periodically have conference calls with missionaries.
- **Evaluation** of requests for support and the individual/agency’s background. Sadly there are more requests for help than resources available.
- **Financial support.** Some churches give very little to many missionaries, and ought to re-think their support by giving a decent amount to fewer missionaries. Some large churches are “sending churches,” providing 100% support to a few missionaries, freeing them from having to go on extensive deputation trips to raise support. When they come home on furlough they spend time exclusively with their sending church. Many churches determine their missions budget through a set percentage of total offerings or through pledges.
- **Send**—churches should be calling for people to consider a missionary vocation and become the sending church, with full or nearly full support.

How to Pray for Missionaries—pray for their:

- Physical, emotional, and spiritual needs
- Relationships with other missionaries
- Relationships with nationals
- Ability to communicate—linguistic mastery and cultural discernment
- Wisdom in effectively presenting the Gospel
- Family life

- Protection amid political instability
- Freedom to work
- Adequate support

How to encourage missionaries:

- Send them personal letters and care packages (find out what they want)
- Connect with them on social media
- Ask questions about their work
- Remember their birthdays & anniversaries
- Support them financially and encourage others to do so
- Encourage them when on furlough
- Host them when they visit your church
- Help them fund a vacation, retreat or conference

The relationship between missionaries and supporting churches is a two-way connection. I was talking to a former missionary my former church supported. He said, “I really appreciate how responsive your church was to my work.” I replied, “That was easy; you were great in keeping us informed. You even sent us gifts.” I realize that missionaries do not have time to always write a personal letter or email, but if you don’t even get a quarterly newsletter, it may be time to determine if you should continue your support. Church members should make the effort to write to them, let them know who they are, and express appreciation for their demanding work.

Speaking of support, many mission organizations are members of the ECFA, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. This is an accrediting agency for religious non-profits with high standards. Their seal of approval indicates that the agency meets their strict standards of fiscal responsibility, covering doctrine, governance, financial oversight, transparency, compensation integrity, and

stewardship of charitable gifts. EFCA approval shows that they are good stewards of their resources and can be trusted.

Churches can become self-centered and blindsided to the global efforts outside their area of influence. The Great Commission needs funding, prayer support, and personal encouragement, something we all can provide.

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Facility Utilization

If your church is conveniently located and has rooms suitable for a variety of meetings, you are apt to get requests from the community. The local AA, theater group, Scouts, garden club, and others may wish to meet there. The positive side is they enter your facility and see that it is a welcoming place. The downside is that some groups tend to *take over* and act like this is their personal space. The opposite is also true: because this isn't their place, they may tend to not take good care of it by causing damage or not cleaning up. Churches need a facility utilization policy. Here is an example...

Guidelines for Groups using our church

- **The Mission** of our church Trustees and staff is to support individuals and groups who use our facility. The desired relationship between the church staff and church users is mutual cooperation. Our aim is to cheerfully support all approved activities.
- **Support** will be limited to written requests approved by the Board of Trustees (see attached forms). Church activities (such as choirs, Bible studies and board meetings) will receive preference. Recurring activities need only a one-time written request which may be updated as necessary. Secular community activities (e.g. Scouting functions, parties and support groups) will receive secondary priority. Approved

requests will be placed on the church calendar. The church does not provide paper goods and trash bags for non-church functions. Wi-fi is available.

- **Point of Contact**—two representatives of the group will act as POC, and will provide phone numbers and email where they can be reached. The POC will inform the church staff of any changes regarding group needs, or if the activity needs to be cancelled or postponed. Please do not tell us at the last moment. Other groups may wish to use the church.

- **Coordination**—groups desiring to use the facility must coordinate with our Church Administrative Assistant, and Board of Trustees.

- **Appearance of the facility**—we try very hard to ensure that all areas of the church are in good shape, but we can't guarantee with the high usage of the various rooms that everything will meet your standards... we do the best we can.

- **Taking care of the facility**—the requestor is responsible for cleaning and straightening up the area after use. Church furniture and musical instruments may not be moved without permission from the Pastor or Chair of the Trustees. Please remove all personal items and return all hymnals and Bibles to the pew racks. Children are to be supervised by adults at all times. They should not be leaving and returning to the building. Groups using the church will be responsible for any breakage/damage to the facility. Upon leaving, all lights must be off and the building properly secured/locked.

- **Non-religious events**—Church members are welcome to request use of the facility for events such as birthday and graduation parties, bridal and baby showers. Requests from non-church groups/individuals will be appraised on a per-case basis. It is our desire to reach out to our community... however, we reserve the right to determine whether non-religious activities are appropriate for our facility.

- **Displaying, hanging, or taping** of banners, pictures or posters, etc. is not permitted without the Trustee's approval and any request must be stated on the facility request form.

- **Food and drinks** may not be brought into or consumed in the church sanctuary.

- **Kitchen & Bathroom cleanliness**—sinks must be cleaned, faucets shut off, utensils returned to their original place. Unused food may not be left in the refrigerator. Counter tops must be free from dishes, food and crumbs. Trash must be bagged. There will be no cutting of anything on the counter tops. Ensure that after use the stove is shut off. Feminine products go in the trash, not the toilet. Please inspect the kitchen and bathrooms before departing. If preparing food here, you need a Certified Food Handler present.

- **Handicap accessibility**—(Explain whether your church is partially or fully ADA compliant)

- **Alcohol/Tobacco**—alcoholic beverages may not be consumed by any group using the church facility; and the entire facility is designated non-smoking. Should your group go outside to smoke, police the area afterwards.

- **Gambling**—we do not allow raffles, gaming, or similar gambling activities in our church.

- **Usage Fees**—There is a donation of \$_____ for a one-time all-day use of the facility; \$_____ per evening meetings. Groups using the facility on a regular/weekly basis are asked to give a monthly monetary donation of \$_____ to cover expenses for utilities, upkeep and custodial care. Take a collection at your meeting if your group does not have an operating account.

- **Clean-up**—we maintain recycling bins which we hope you'll use. You are responsible for cleaning up after your activity, or you may wish to hire our Sexton.

- **Exceptions to Policy**—requests must be put in writing to the Church Board of Trustees who will make a final determination.
- **Failure to comply** with stated church policies concerning facility usage may result in the loss of church-use privileges.
- For recurring meetings, we will place your activity on our church calendar which is available on our website.
- **Finally**—This is a consecrated building, the House of the Lord, dedicated for religious/spiritual activities. Please treat our church with reverence.

Church Facility Request Form

Today's Date _____

Date(s) Facility is needed _____ Time: _____ to _____

Recurring or one-time program? _____

Type of Activity/Program _____

Expected Attendance _____

Name of Requester _____

Requester's Address _____

Requester's Phone number (work) _____ (home) _____

Requester's Email address _____

Alternate Requestor/point-of-contact _____

Check YES or NO:

YES

NO

Kitchen required

Fellowship room required

Nursery required

Classroom(s) required

of rooms _____

Stone Hall (gym)

Special requests _____

I, _____, the requester of this facility, will be responsible for setting up, securing (locking up), and cleaning of this facility after usage as outlined in the Church facility usage policy letter. I have read and understand the current standard operating procedures and realize that failure to comply with church policies may result in termination of further usage of this facility.

Signature of Requester

Signature of Approving Authority
Chair, Board of Trustees

- INDEMNITY AGREEMENT -

For value received, the undersigned jointly and severally agree to indemnify and save harmless _____ Church, Inc. and their successors and assigns, from any claim, liability, loss, damage or suit, arising from the following:

In the event of any asserted claim, the Indemnities against said claim or any loss or liability there under.

In the further event the undersigned shall fail to so defend and/or indemnify and save harmless, then in such instance the Indemnities shall have full rights to defend, pay or settle said claim on their own behalf without notice to undersigned and with full rights to recourse against the undersigned for all fees, costs, expenses and payments made or agreed to be paid to discharge said claim.

Upon default, the undersigned further agree to pay all reasonable attorney's fees necessary to enforce the agreement.

This agreement shall be unlimited as to amount or duration.

This agreement shall be binding upon and inure to the benefits of the parties, their successors, assigns and personal representatives.

Signed this _____ day of _____ (month), _____ (year)

Witnessed:

Witness

First Party

Witness

Second Party

• • •

Abuse Policy

We live in a fallen, broken world, which necessitates providing for the security of children. The following is a sample church abuse policy...

CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES PROTECTION POLICY OVERVIEW

The disturbing and traumatic rise in physical and sexual abuse of children has claimed the attention of our nation and society. This policy reflects our desire to provide protective care of all children, youth, and adults who participate in church sponsored activities. Our intention is to protect our children through preventing and reporting abuse, and by educating the congregation.

- An attempt will be made to see that all volunteers who work with children and youth have been actively attending _____ Church for at least six (6) months. They may or may not be a member of the church.
- _____ Church will annually train church volunteers in what child abuse is and how to spot it, and be given a copy of the abuse policy.
- An effort will be made to CORI screen adult volunteers working with children.
- All individuals appointed or elected to positions involved in the care or instruction of children under eighteen years of age will be required to provide in writing, information concerning any previous complaints, charges, and/or convictions of physical or sexual abuse against children under eighteen years of age. This information will be provided on the attached form.

- If an incident of alleged abuse occurs, the Pastor or Director of Christian Education will report allegations to DSS and/or the police.
- Final decisions concerning implementation and/or changes in this policy will rest with the congregation of the _____ Church.

DEFINITIONS

Types of Abuse

- **Child neglect** is defined as omission of the child's basic needs (physical, environmental, emotional, nutritional) for his or her physical and emotional well-being. It is this area to which the church is most open to liability if proper supervision is not provided and safety rules are not set and enforced.
- **Emotional abuse** involves verbal or non-verbal violence toward a child that gives the child the message that he or she is "not good." Teasing, name-calling, or any other form of demeaning a child falls into this category.
- **Physical abuse** involves physical aggression toward a child where the leader is not in control, is under stress, or has little control over impulses. It can also be intentional infliction of harm on a child. Often it is the transference of adult anger into physical aggression against a child. This could include not only hitting a child, but also grabbing, pulling or pushing a child.
- **Sexual abuse** or sexual molestation involves any sexual act between a child and an adult or an older child and a younger child. Sexual acts can involve touch such as fondling or sexual penetration or non-touch, such as exposing a child to pornography or sexual acts. Children are powerless and not in a position to responsibly consent to these sexual interactions.

Signs of Abuse

- **General:** Children who are experiencing stress may exhibit behavioral signs of that stress. When signs of stress are present, it can be assumed that the child is in need of help to resolve the source of stress. Children who are in abusive situations are under stress, and therefore will probably exhibit signs of stress. Some symptoms of general childhood stress are: crying for no apparent reason, immature clinging or aggressive behavior, withdrawal, inability to concentrate, depression.

These signs of general childhood stress may be caused by any number of factors, such as divorce, death, school problems, or peer/family relations. In helping the child address the cause of stress, it is often helpful to make a statement to the child that ‘reflects’ what you see the child is going through as evidenced by his behavior. For example, “Is something bothering you, you seem so sad today?” Such a question provides an opportunity for the child to talk about his problem without depending on the adult to prejudge the cause of stress.

- **Specific:** No single indicator is proof that a child is being abused. It is, however, a reason to look more closely at the child’s behavior and to consider the possibility of abuse.
- **Child Neglect and Emotional Abuse:** It is extremely difficult for a lay person to detect emotional abuse or neglect with any degree of certainty. The physical signs are subtle, such as lagging behind in physical development or habit disorders. The neglected child may show up inappropriately dressed, lacking in personal hygiene, or being consistently hungry. Behaviorally, the emotionally abused and neglected child may display signs of childhood stress. There may, however, be other explanations, so leaders should exercise caution in forming conclusions.
- **Physical abuse:** Active children will experience a normal amount of physical injury, generally minor in nature. There are, however, distinct differences between normal “wear and tear” on children and bodily signs

of physical abuse. These indicators are unusual bruises, burns, breaks, lacerations, and abrasions. A child who is physically abused is likely to display manifestations of general childhood stress even after the physical scars have healed.

- **Sexual abuse:** In some cases there may be physical signs of sexual abuse of a child. Behavioral signs are likely to appear over a long time and are more noticeable. Some examples of behavioral signs are: age-inappropriate understanding of sex, reluctance to be left alone with a particular person or fear of touch.¹

GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN'S WORKERS

- It is desirable that every group of children have at least two workers present at all times. At times this may be difficult, but having another adult worker present is your best protection against false allegations. It is a good rule never to be alone with a child.
- It is recommended that solid doors be kept open in classrooms where children's activities are occurring. Most doors have or will have windows in them.
- Physical contact with children should be made with care and discretion and should be given only in the presence of other workers.
- Children should have as much privacy as possible when using the restroom.
- Workers should have attended _____ Church for at least six months before they work in children's ministries. Workers should also complete a training program.

The above definitions were excerpted from *The Protection Guidelines for Children, Teachers and Children's Ministry Workers* written for and with permission from Trinity Evangelical Free Church, Woodbridge, CT.

- Workers should recognize the dangers of allegations of child abuse when they are alone with a child (i.e., transporting children, camping trips, counseling sessions) and it is recommended that another adult be present.
- Extreme care should be taken when workers find themselves transporting children home after an activity as this can open the door for false accusations of child abuse. This should only be done with parents' prior permission.
- If a worker suspects child abuse, they should report it to the mandatory reporter.

GUIDELINES FOR TEEN MINISTRY LEADERS/WORKERS

- Two leaders/workers should be present at all times and at all activities.
- The Pastor and Religious Education Board should approve all activities or outings outside the normal planned youth ministry calendar.
- It is preferred that leaders/workers attend our church for at least six months before they apply to work in teen ministries. They should also complete a training program.
- Physical contact with teens should be made with care and discretion and should be given only in the presence of other leaders/workers and/or teens.
- Counseling situations – one on one:
 1. Same gender (men – boys; women – girls). If a worker is approached by a youth of the opposite gender, that person should preferably be referred to a worker of the same gender.
 2. Counsel in public places when off the church premises.
 3. When counseling on church premises, solid doors should be open.
 4. Never counsel in the church building alone – someone else needs to be in the building.

5. If counseling is done in the youth leader's home, another adult should be present.
 6. Any on-going counseling done by a youth leader should be done in consultation with the Pastor.
- The above guidelines apply to all youth activities, retreats and conferences.
 - Leaders should be extremely careful in transporting youth home after activities. This should be done only with parent's prior permission and if at all possible another leader/worker should be along.
 - Leader/workers should have parents/guardians complete a permission slip (attached) and submit it to the youth leader/worker prior to any scheduled trips. This form will be kept on file for one year.
 - If a leader/worker suspects child abuse they should report it to their supervisor who should report it to the mandatory reporter.

PLAN FOR RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS

Note: These steps are not necessarily done in numeric order, but all need to be done in an immediate manner.

If an allegation of child abuse occurs:

- Report to the Mandatory Reporter.
- Mandatory Reporter should make sure the victim is safe and then contact the authorities.
- Document all efforts at handling incident (e.g. written log of "just the facts"). Remember the log could be subpoenaed for evidence.
- Mandatory Reporter reports the incident immediately to the church insurance agency and contact an attorney. Do not try to handle this without professional outside assistance. Remember confidentiality of both victim and accused needs to be protected.

- Reach out with support to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support can go a long way in starting the healing process. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Treat everyone involved with dignity and respect.

OVERVIEW OF APPLICATIONS

Application for Children and Teen Ministry Volunteers: Filled out by all people who regularly and occasionally engage in the supervision of children at CCC such as Sunday School teachers, youth workers, nursery and Children's Church workers.

Application for Church Employees Working with Children and Teens: Filled out by those who hired to work with children and teens. An interview is required of these employees with references and background checks.

Dealing With Registered Sex Offenders

Offenders are predisposed to recidivism even after treatment. Some may seek the spiritual support of local churches, which can put congregations at risk. Shunned by society in general, they find acceptance nearly impossible. Ministry to all people, regardless of their past sins, is a church function, yet policy restrictions need to be in place to protect the congregation. These restrictions may well be a disincentive to offenders, but they are for their protection as well as ours. Non-compliance will result in the individual(s) being barred from the church.

The church will make a formal covenant with registered sex offenders who wish to attend services, limiting their participation and access. Restrictions are administered in a case-by-case basis and may include the following options:

- Full disclosure to the congregation, including the list of restrictions
- Restricted to the sanctuary during worship
- Escorted to and from their car

- Offenders are barred from the church restrooms unless escorted
- Access to fellowship areas and activities is limited.
- Will not take on any leadership or teaching positions
- Not allowed to attend the annual church picnic
- Designated leaders to monitor the offender, possibly the “deacon of the month”
- Offenders will have quarterly meetings with a church leadership board to review their progress; minutes of the meetings will be recorded
- Offenders will not initiate contact with children—talking, etc.
- No access to Religious Education areas/classrooms

Application for Children and Teen Ministry Employment

-C O N F I D E N T I A L-

This application is to be completed by all applicants who regularly engage in the supervision of children/teen at _____ Church or serve as supervisors of children/teen volunteers. It is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our program.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name _____

Birth Date _____

Maiden Name _____ Social Security No. _____

Present Address

City/State/Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

Children	Age	Name
----------	-----	------

Previous Address, if less than 5 years at current address:

What type of children's work are you applying for?

C. E. Director _____ Music Director _____ Teen Group _____

Other

Please indicate the date you would be available to begin: _____

What is the minimum length of commitment you can make? _____

Do you have a current driver's license? _____ -If yes, please list your

Driver's License number

_____ State _____

PRESENT EMPLOYMENT

Employer: _____

Address: _____

Supervisor's Name/Title _____

Phone (_____) _____

Employment Dates: From _____ To _____

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Have you ever been convicted of any offense against the law or participated in any diversionary program such as an accelerated rehabilitation program, alcohol education program, drug education program or family violence program?

_____yes _____no

If yes, please explain:

Have you, as an adult or minor, ever been accused, charged or alleged to have committed any act of neglecting, abusing, or molesting any child?

_____yes _____no

If yes, please explain in detail:

EXPERIENCE

List all previous church work involving children/teens (list each church's name and address, type of work performed and dates)

List all previous non-church work involving children/teens, for example: Scouting, JROTC, Civil Air Patrol, sports teams, school activities (list each organization's name and address and the type of work performed and dates):

List any callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you for children or teen work.

PERSONAL REFERENCES

List two people you've known for at least one year, who are not related to you and have a definite knowledge of your character and qualifications to work with children/teens.

1. Name: _____

Nature of Association _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone: Home (____) _____ Cell (____) _____

2. Name: _____

Nature of Association _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone (____) _____

APPLICANT'S STATEMENT

In your interview you will be asked if you a survivor of abuse or molestation, particularly while a minor or if you have ever had a problem with drug/alcohol abuse. You may refuse to answer this or any of the above questions, or you may

wish to discuss your answers in confidence with the interviewer or pastor. Answering yes, or leaving a question unanswered will not automatically disqualify an applicant from children or teen work. If you have concerns regarding the nature or need for asking these questions, please feel free to ask. Information contained in this application will be kept confidential and will be disclosed only to those authorized to know in order to carry out their responsibilities at _____ Church.

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give you any information that they may have.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Constitution and By-Laws of the _____ Church, comply with the Children's Ministry Policy of _____ Church and refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

Signature _____ Date _____

CONSENT AND RELEASE

I, _____, am an applicant for a position working with children and/or teens at _____ Church, and as such recognize the importance of my character being above reproach. I understand _____ Church may conduct a thorough background check including police checks. Accordingly, I give permission to _____ Church to include my name on a list for screening purposes via a police check.

I hereby release and hold harmless from liability, all persons, organizations and other entities which provide references or information to _____ Church with regard to me or my background.

I hereby release and hold harmless from liability _____ Church, its staff, employees and volunteers with regard to any decision that it makes on my application.

Signature _____

Date _____

Application for Children and Teen Ministry Volunteers

- C O N F I D E N T I A L -

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

The disturbing and traumatic rise of physical and sexual abuse of children has claimed the attention of our nation and society. The following procedures reflect our attempt to provide protective care of all children and teens who participate in church sponsored activities.

1. All adult volunteers working with children or teens should have been attending _____ Church for a minimum of six months.
2. It is desirable that adult volunteers strive to observe the “two adult” rule when working with children. Adults should strive to never be alone with children or teens without a partner.
3. Adult volunteers should immediately report any behaviors which seem abusive or inappropriate to their supervisors.

As a church volunteer, do you agree to observe all of the above church policies regarding working with children or teens? _____ Yes _____ No

Have you ever been convicted of any offense against the law concerning any previous complaints, charges, and/or conviction of physical or sexual abuse, molestation, or neglect against children under eighteen years of age? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, please explain:

PERMISSION SLIP

This form must be signed by a parent/guardian in order for the child to attend this activity of the _____ Church

Signature _____ Date _____

Date _____

I, _____, mother/father/guardian of _____, grant permission for my daughter/son to attend _____ (function), at _____ (address and phone number) on _____ (date) with the _____ Church. I understand the children will leave from _____ (location)

and will be transported by _____ (mode of transportation).

I have health/medical/hospitalization insurance coverage for my child and agree that is primary to any coverage that the church might carry. I know of no allergies to foods or drink that my child has except:

_____. I recognize that this activity is for the benefit and enjoyment of my child and is part of the ministry of _____ Church.

I may be reached at _____ (phone number) in case of an emergency. If I am not available you can contact:

_____ (name),

at _____ (phone number).

I give my authorization for the chaperone to seek any medical assistance he/she deems necessary in the event of an accident or illness to the above named child.

Signature of mother/father/or guardian _____

The leader of this church activity: _____

The activity leader may be contacted at _____

Please contact the church if you have any questions regarding this trip/activity.

• • •

Emergency Action Plans

In our troubled world, we are appalled by violence but hardly surprised. Churches need contingency plans to be ready for emergencies—reducing panic and saving lives. Trained responders need to be prepared for the worst, and congregations need to be shown what to do to remain safe in threatening events, to include fire or

explosion, severe weather (tornado, earthquake, flooding) , medical emergencies, active shooters, and bomb threats.

Trained personnel (who may act as emergency coordinators) include the pastoral staff, church council, trustees, Diaconate, and Religious Education director.

Ushers/greeters need training in responding to aggressive or agitated strangers. The safety protocol includes securing the facility after the service starts, limiting access.

Churches need to establish evacuation plans and conduct drills so all know how to safely and calmly exit the building or respond to an active shooter situation. Church leaders should identify and enlist the cooperation of medical personnel within the congregation. Some churches encourage trusted individuals who have a concealed gun license to carry in church. The location of defibrillators, first aid kits and fire extinguishers need to be common knowledge. Exits need to be clearly marked.

Following an incident the emergency response team needs to determine who may be in need of medical assistance, whether anyone is missing, and if/when it is safe to reenter the building.

• • •

Weddings

I've performed a lot of weddings over the years. Most of the couples whose marriages I've celebrated appeared relaxed, but not all. A few brides and grooms nearly didn't survive the ceremony. Even though getting married is a wonderful experience, nerves can take over. At one wedding I saw the groom sweating profusely, and the bride had broken out with purple blotches. I sped through the rest of the ceremony, hoping they would make it to the end! To make matters worse, when they knelt down, the congregation started to chuckle. Someone had written "Help Me" on the bottom of the groom's shoes! Grooms should check their shoes

carefully when getting married! A wedding is a festive celebration, but I've seen a few couples who were a bit too festive and who failed to take the solemnity of the occasion seriously; they acted like the ceremony was one big joke. Proper decorum extends to the guests. At one wedding parents did not control their children, who ran up and down the aisles, and the bride's father and his biker gang showed up wearing black t-shirts that read: "*I'll see you in Hell.*"

I've seen a few brides and grooms who looked like they were attending their execution. I've been tempted to offer them a blindfold and a cigarette! I tell couples at the rehearsal that if I see them looking especially grim during the ceremony I'm going to make eye contact with them and give them a big smile!

Whenever I perform a wedding I require premarital counseling. I'm amazed at how many people enter marriage without proper preparation. My premarital syllabus is titled "Preventive Maintenance." You cannot get a driver's license without driver's training, but to obtain a marriage license requires no preparation whatsoever! Yet being married is a harder skill than driving a car. Most premarital counseling deals with issues such as: communication, expectations, values, problem-solving, in-laws, sexual adjustment, spiritual growth, money management, personality differences, and love.

Many couples appear unclear on what love is all about. We talk and sing about it, but we scratch our heads when asked to define love. People have said to me, "love is a feeling you feel that you've never felt before," and "love is needing each other." I've even been told "Love is a sickness." Here is my definition: Love is...

- *Unconditional*—for better or worse;
- *Sacrificial*—the one I love has priority over me;
- *Faithful*—when I say "I do", I'm saying "I don't" to everyone else;
- *Compassionate*—full of affection; *responsible*—characterized by wisdom and maturity; and

- **Commitment**—“for keeps”, “till death do us part”, a life-long relationship. Love is a choice. People who claim they’ve “fallen” out of love have simply decided to stop loving.

Love means we do our best to keep the lines of communication open. We don’t assume too much, and we avoid mind-reading (assuming intent). We check things out, we ask for clarification. We speak the truth in love. We need to recognize that communication is a process of going beyond what is said to what is meant.

The divorce rate would be lower if couples had more spiritual oneness. Marriages today desperately need God’s power and the encouragement that comes from being active in church, getting to know other families in an affirming environment. The Bible says that “We love (we’re *able* to love) because God first loved us”. At most weddings I recite I Corinthians 13, the “love chapter” of the Bible. The Apostle Paul provides a list of love characteristics, spelling out what love does and doesn’t do. It’s a pretty high standard, and sometimes when I read it I’m reminded how I don’t exactly measure up. Yet I trust God’s love, which enables and empowers ours. We can let God love others through us.

Handling wedding requests

Some pastors suffer the curse of having a beautiful church, in that they receive many requests for weddings from couples who have no intention of being a part of the congregation. Every church needs a Wedding Policy and Application. Here one you may wish to adapt:

Sample Wedding policy

You must be excited now that your wedding plans are underway! This fact-sheet should tell you most of what you need to know about having your wedding at our church. A careful reading of our wedding policy will help in the planning and celebration of your wedding.

• **A Sacred Service**—Church weddings are religious ceremonies that conform to the convictions of denominational requirements. The Pastor's availability depends on the demands of his professional schedule and personal/family needs. Wedding ceremonies will contain elements determined by the Pastor's ecclesiastical requirements and liturgical usage. Couples are free to discuss personal preferences such as musical selections, Scripture, poetry readings and other creative touches with the Pastor. Note: non-religious or civil ceremonies will not be held in the church.

• **Going to a minister for a wedding** is not like going to a medical clinic or law firm where any available doctor or lawyer will do. You should want to have a personal relationship with your Pastor as your spiritual guide and friend, and regard the church congregation as your extended family. Ministers are **not** religious service providers performing ceremonial procedures.

• **Other clergy** may officiate at church weddings at the discretion of the Pastor and Board of Deacons. Gratuities to outside clergy are the sole responsibility of the wedding party. The officiating minister is expected to conduct the rehearsal. The church staff does not provide a list of clergy who perform weddings. It is the responsibility of each couple to secure clergy services for their own wedding.

• **Persons authorized to have Church weddings**-- The church is available subject to scheduling. Priority for church weddings:

1. Individuals who are *currently active* in the religious program of our church.
2. Former members who have moved out of state who wish to return to their home church for sentimental reasons.
3. All others.

Exceptions to policy regarding priority will be considered at the discretion of the Pastor and Deacon Board.

• **A word about church weddings:** Many couples desire church weddings out of a strong sense of tradition. A church wedding sends a message to your family and

friends that religious faith and active participation in church are important to you. A Christian wedding is also a rededication of one's life to Christ.

- **Premarital Preparation**--Couples are required to make arrangements for premarital counseling with the pastor; those residing out of state and unable to come for counseling must provide the church staff a letter or certificate of premarital counseling from their Pastor.

- **Reserving the Church**—Our church may be reserved for a wedding as early as 6 months prior to, but no less than 2 months before the ceremony. Reservations must be made in person. Telephonic reservations will not be accepted. The pastor will consider exceptions to policy on a case-by-case basis. Weddings will not be scheduled on religious holidays (e.g. Holy Week), or during times of scheduled parish activities.

- **Candles & equipment.**--The Church does not furnish any candles except the 2 upon the altar, which are used in our worship services. Extra candles for Unity/Trinity candles and candelabra will be provided by the wedding party. If using candelabra, drip pads will be used (provided by the wedding party). A kneeler is available. Church furnishings must be treated with extreme care. In no cases may Church furniture be moved. Aisle runners, arches, etc. are not provided but can be rented from local wedding suppliers.

- **Pew Bows & Flowers**--may only be used if they can be attached by ribbon or string--no tape, glue, staples or nails will be allowed. The wedding party is responsible for the removal of flowers, bows, and trash after the service. Clothing, cameras and other valuable items are sometimes left in the excitement of the moment. Have someone designated to check the sanctuary for such items.

- **Rice**--the throwing of rice, flowers, helium balloons or confetti is prohibited inside the church and at the entrances & approaches to the church. Birdseed is permitted, although we'd prefer that you carry out this custom at your reception location.

• **Receptions**--The fellowship hall downstairs has seating capacity of 100 and is subject to availability based on scheduled Church activities. Arrange with the sexton for set-up, for an extra fee. Receptions must be over by 10:00 pm and the wedding party is responsible for clean-up. Please let your minister know ahead of time if you wish to invite him/her (and spouse) to your rehearsal dinner and/or reception.

• **Music**--arrangements for wedding music are made under the guidance of the Pastor or clergy in charge of the service. We ask that you check first as to the availability of our church organist. We require that organists be members in good standing with the American Guild of Church Organists in order to use our pipe organ. Otherwise, your musician may bring in a portable keyboard or play our piano. Recorded music is also allowable. Any soloists must provide the organist a copy of the music to be sung, written in the key in which it is to be played, and are expected to attend the rehearsal to practice their selection(s). Music selected should be appropriate for a service of worship in order to reflect the religious significance of marriage. The same good taste should be true for your reception; make sure you coordinate with whoever is providing the entertainment.

• **Photography**--Your wedding is a sacred rite, and discretion must be used in picture-taking. Some photographers disrupt the worship atmosphere pursuing what they believe to be a good picture. Flash photography is permitted during the processional and recessional, but *at no other times during the ceremony*. Please advise your official photographer and your guests of this restriction. Available-light photography is recommended during the ceremony. Photographers must be unobtrusive and properly attired. They may not come up to the altar area during the ceremony; in general they are to keep a low profile. Stationary video cameras are permitted in inconspicuous locations in the rear of the church. No distracting lighting is allowed for video cameras. Couples should plan to stage flash photos and close-ups for 15-30 minutes after the ceremony, where all aspects of the ceremony can be re-created, along with group pictures. This rule is for your benefit; some photographers can

disrupt the ceremony, calling attention to themselves, with disregard for the audience, and *they will not be allowed back*.

- **Timing**--We encourage punctuality for the wedding party & guests; should people you are certain are coming fail to arrive on time, the minister may be persuaded to delay the ceremony up to 15 minutes. However, on a day when other weddings are scheduled, the ceremonies must begin on time. The wedding party is expected to arrive at the church at least 30 minutes prior to the ceremony. In the case of an emergency (e.g. car breakdown) call the church office so we can make adjustments.

- **Child Care** is not provided for weddings or rehearsals. Please arrange to have individuals attending the ceremony supervise children of members of the wedding party.

- **Expenses**—For those who are presently actively attending church there is no fee for the Pastor's services, nor for the use of the church... for all others the fees are: \$_____ made out to the minister, plus \$_____ made out to our church. In addition, there is for all weddings an \$_____ fee to cover the Sexton/custodial services; there is an additional \$_____ for the sexton if you choose to use our hall for your reception or rehearsal dinner. The organist's fee is \$_____ (plus \$_____ if the organist attends the rehearsal). These fees are to be paid at the wedding rehearsal. You are responsible for all fees charged by outside clergy, photographers, florists, other musicians, soloists, bakery, or any other persons employed by you in the conduct of your wedding. The Deacons maintains a benevolence fund to assist couples in situations where financial hardship is involved.

- **Cancellations/Changes** – The church office must be notified immediately if your wedding is to be canceled or if there is a need to change the date or time of the ceremony or rehearsal. You are expected to verify your wedding approximately 2 weeks prior to the service; otherwise the staff will assume that the ceremony has been canceled.

• **Rehearsal** – The entire wedding party should be present; if any key individuals are absent, the bride & groom are responsible to brief those individuals prior to the ceremony. Fees are to be paid at the rehearsal.

• **Documentation:** Bring your marriage license to the rehearsal so that it can be filled out and signed prior to the ceremony. You will receive a marriage certificate from the Pastor, which is not a legal document. Your wedding will be recorded in our church marriage book, which is maintained by our Church Clerk. We do not keep on file copies of licenses or certificates. Be sure to place a copy of your license in your important papers.

• **Guests**--The seating capacity of our Church is _____. The easiest way to approach the church is (directions)

• **Finally**--The church staff sincerely hopes that your wedding will be a joyous celebration of God's love. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact us right away. We wish you God's richest blessing on your marriage!

Wedding Reservation Application

Name of Requester _____

Bride's full name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Bride's Home Church/Address _____

Bride's Parents' Names _____

Parents' Address _____

Groom's full name _____

Address _____

Phone_____Email_____

Groom's Home Church/Address_____

Groom's Parents' Names_____

Parents' Address_____

Name of Clergy performing ceremony_____

Ceremony location if other than our church_____

Rehearsal date & time_____

Set-up/decorating date & time_____

Wedding date & time_____

Estimated attendance_____ Name of organist_____

Name of soloist(s)_____

Reader & passage (Scripture/poem)_____

Best Man_____ Maid/Matron of Honor_____

Ring Bearer_____ Flower Girl_____

Who will be "giving away" the bride?_____

Name, phone and mailing address or email of photographer_____

(*Note: A letter explaining our wedding photography policy will be sent to your photographer)

Wedding Consultant name/phone_____

Special arrangements/equipment/needs_____

Name & phone of florist_____

Place of Reception _____

Signature of Requester (*This confirms that I have read and will comply with the wedding policy*):

X _____

Copies Furnished to the Church Administrative Assistant & Board of Deacons/Elders

The Reception

The minister ought to attend some of the reception. You might use this occasion to present the marriage certificate to the bride and groom. In talking with the guests you'll have opportunities to invite them to church. You should also say grace before the meal. Coordinate this with the D.J. or whoever is the Master of Ceremonies.

» Here is a *reception prayer* you could use:

“Holy Lord and Author of Love: the ceremony we have just witnessed celebrates a bond that is much more than moonlight and roses, more than the singing of songs, more than affectionate words whispered. In Your sight, marriage is a lifelong union, the blending of two lives, the joining of two hearts, and the carrying out of a sacred covenant. The marriage of _____ & _____ will endure, not by any ceremony or license, but by the impact of Your love that will keep them true and committed to one another. Bless now our joyous time of festivity as we express our delight in Your providential bringing together of bride and groom. We are here to make merry! Loving Lord, cause _____ & _____’s home to be always a haven of faith hope and love, and reliance on our Savior, who gave Himself unconditionally for us. Amen.”

Innovative Wedding Ceremony Ideas

- Unity/Trinity candle – couple takes two candles which are lit prior to the service by their mothers (as part of their being escorted down the aisle), then together light the

middle candle and blow out the separate candles, which symbolizes the two becoming one. Works with a 3-pronged candelabra or a large wedding candle plus two tapers.

- As the bride walks down the aisle for the processional, she hands each mother a rose from her bouquet; or as the couple walks up the aisle for the recessional, they each hand a long-stemmed rose to their new mother-in-law (or this could be incorporated at the reception with the cake-cutting ceremony).
- Processional idea—the bride and groom enter from opposite directions, meet, and together walk the rest of the way.
- Recessional idea—have a few strolling musicians lead the bride and groom up the aisle; turn it into a grand march.
- For some couples, “old” is “new”. If they’re interested in a particular era, their clothes could reflect this: Victorian, Pioneer days, Cowboy wedding, Art Deco, etc.
- Research customs for one’s ethnic background and incorporate music, clothing, etc. into one’s ceremony.
- Have a table with childhood photos of the bride and groom
- Have disposable/one-use cameras on each table at the reception; encourage guests to take pictures... but don’t get in the way of the professional photographer.
- If money is tight, have a late wedding, 7 or 8 pm followed by a simple reception with cake and coffee.

Wedding Rehearsal Checklist

Assemble the wedding party and begin with prayer:

“Lord God, You are the Author of love. Be with us as we prepare to celebrate Your love through the marriage of _____ & _____. Impress us with the holy significance of the marriage covenant, and may this holy ordinance of dedication bring You glory; this we ask, in the Name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus—Amen.”

Explain to all: This is a *celebration*—not a funeral! Enjoy yourselves, smile, even some laughter is appropriate (as long as you’re not laughing at the bride & groom!). Sometimes weddings can seem stressful—we want everything to go just right. Because of this tension, we can miss the fun. I’ve seen brides coming down the aisle looking like they were going to their execution. If anything goes less than perfect, don’t worry. If you’re not sure where we are in the ceremony, that’s OK, because you have nothing to memorize. I have the script, and I’ll be directing everything that goes on. If you make a mistake, it’s no big deal. Everything should go just fine. The main thing is to enjoy the celebration.

Details to keep in mind:

- The bride and groom’s mothers are usually the last to be seated, just prior to the processional. Optional—they can light the candles on both sides of the unity candle with an acolyte candle lighter.
- The ushers are responsible for lighting all other candles—altar, candelabra, but not the Unity candles. The Best Man serves as the Head Usher.
- The wedding party should be assembled at the church at least a half-hour before the wedding (I’ll be here an hour prior to the service). If no one is here, and no one has called, the service may have to be postponed till another day. We hope to start on time, but if someone you’re sure is coming hasn’t arrived, or if a mob arrives at the last minute, I’m willing to delay the service a bit .
- **NO** flash photography during the ceremony, except for the processional and recessional—this includes the guests!
- The organist should be paid at the rehearsal, and should know what color dress to wear.
- Seating—if one side of the family is significantly larger, consider open seating so the sanctuary doesn’t appear lopsided.

- Maid of Honor—holds the groom’s ring and the bride’s bouquet during the ring exchange; she adjusts the bride’s train when necessary during the ceremony. She helps the bride dress and later change.
- Best Man—makes sure the groom is properly dressed (shoes on the correct feet etc.); carries the bride’s ring; is in charge of the ushers; gives the toast at the reception, and most importantly: *he makes sure the groom doesn’t escape!*
- My attire—robe (white or black), suit?
- Marriage license—I need it this evening so I can have everything filled in for you.

Ceremony run-through

The wedding party when assembled will form a semi-circle facing the congregation, with the bride and groom in the center. I will be standing behind them. In most ceremonies you can’t really see the bride & groom. People want to see you, they want to see the expressions on your faces, not how well you combed your hair in the back! You won’t be able to see me as well, but that’s not important. Just listen and I’ll make sure you do everything in order.

The processional—get everyone lined up and explain how to walk slowly.

Thoughts on the ceremony (as we come to these in the run through):

- *The questions to the Bride & Groom*—the answer is “I do”, not “Let me think about this and I’ll get back to you next Thursday!” Also please *speak up*, so people can hear you. I had a wedding where the groom whispered his response (he may have been in shock) and everyone started to laugh. I had to reassure the guests, “He did say it—I *heard* him!”
- *The vows*—It’s “lawful wedded wife”, not “awful wedded wife”. This is the part where many get chocked up, and if this happens to you, don’t feel embarrassed. It’s understandable—this is a most significant/solemn occasion. I’ll give you time to regain your composure.

- *The ring exchange*—If the ring won't go on or won't stay on, or if someone forgets the ring, don't panic. If the won't go on, don't force it; just slip it on half way and bend your fingers to keep it from slipping off. If someone forgets a ring—simulate!
- *Unity Candle*: After lighting the Unity Candle, blow out the other two then place them back in the candelabra/on the altar.
- *Kneeler/prayer of dedication/song*—here's the part where you get to turn your back on the crowd and not have to look at them!
- *The Kiss*—please keep it under 20 minutes!
- *Introduction of the bride and groom at the close of the ceremony*—to organist: As soon as you hear me say: "I would like to introduce to relatives & friends of the family Mr & Mrs _____", immediately start the recessional.
- *Scripture Readers*: Print your reading in large print, double spaced, and rehearse it. Relax and Take your time; don't rush the reading. Introduce the reading by saying, "A reading from _____ - _____," and conclude with "The word of the Lord."
- After the wedding comes the hardest part—posing for photographs. At that point, the photographer is in charge.
- Appoint someone to be in charge of removing decorations, securing the Unity Candle, and decide whether to take or leave the altar area flowers.
- Restroom Locations
- Will anyone need to use the handicap lifts? Do we need handicap parking spaces reserved?

Closing Prayer: "Holy Lord, we believe marriage is a sacred union and a lifelong commitment. We pray that this wedding will reflect our convictions. Seal this covenant with Your love, and as we celebrate with _____ and _____, help them to see that they are not alone as they face life's challenges. Assure them that they have the support of their family, friends, and especially this church. Cause them

to trust You for guidance, and may You be always a significant part of their lives together. This we pray in Jesus' Name, Amen."

Sample Wedding Ceremony

Prelude... The Mothers of the bride & groom may wish to light the outer candles, next to the Unity candle just prior to the processional.

The Processional (organist)

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?
(*"Her mother and I" -father of the bride*)

Greeting: Welcome to our worship and celebration of love, which is made complete by the blessing of God as we respond to His love for us. We are assembled to unite _____ & _____ in marriage, to surround them with our prayers, and to share in their joy. Marriage is a gift of God, a sign of His love, sealed by a sacred covenant.

Let us give attention to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who proclaimed in John's Gospel, chapter 15:

"This is My commandment—love one another as I have loved You. There is no greater love than to sacrificially and unconditionally give of yourselves. By your love and obedience to My will you demonstrate that you are My followers and friends."

Parental Covenant (if the parents of the bride & groom are present):
We recognize that it is out of families that new families emerge. By their presence, the parents of our bride & groom are affirming their blessing. Respecting their authority before God, I now ask:

Do you, Mr. & Mrs. _____ agree that your daughter,
_____, should be united in marriage with _____?
(*"We do"*)

Do you, Mr & Mrs _____ agree that your son, _____,
should be united in marriage with _____? (“We do”)

(*optional) There are departed loved ones we wish were here, but we know they’re watching from Above...

To the Congregation: You who have gathered here this day are not mere observers of this church ordinance; you are witnesses and participants in this sacred celebration. I charge you to offer your loving support to this couple by your faithful prayers and friendship.

Meditation: Married love has been, from the beginning of time, enshrined in dignity and honor. The love of a man and woman is a reflection of the love of Christ for the world. Jesus came to us with unconditional acceptance, sacrificial commitment, and immeasurable compassion. He chose to die for those who did not deserve His love. This is the kind of love that holds a marriage together. Without trust in God, without a foundation of faith, couples cannot hope to withstand the demands and stresses of married life. The covenant of marriage is empowered by an active relationship to God’s covenant community, the Church, where God’s people offer comfort and encouragement during times of joy and distress. The Christ-centered home demonstrates that love is a lifelong process based on choice. Therefore, marriage is a sacred union, instituted by God, and should not be entered casually or temporarily. Marriage is a permanent relationship in which two become one. This divine institution must be approached with mutual commitment, responsibility, maturity, and the desire to make Jesus Christ the Lord of one’s life. Into this holy relationship _____ and _____ have come before the presence of God to be joined. Let us pray...

Invocation: Heavenly Father, we gather this day in Your Name and ask for Your presence and blessing. We thank You for Your love which shows us how to love and enables us to be loving people. As you have brought these two together by your Providence, sanctify and sustain them by Your Spirit. Bless and watch over

_____ & _____ as they dedicate themselves to each other. At the same time may they commit their lives to You. We ask this joyfully in the Name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who has instructed us to pray, saying (*Lord's Prayer*).

The Questions to the Bride & Groom:

_____ (groom), as a follower of the Lord Jesus, do you take this woman as your wife, vowing to be faithful to her in tender love and honor, offering her strength and companionship; and do you pledge to cherish her, as love and respect would lead you, in the holy bonds of marriage? (*"I do."*)

_____ (bride), as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, do you take this man as your husband; vowing to honor, trust and respect him, and do you pledge to give him encouragement, faithfully cherishing him by God's grace, in the holy bonds of marriage? (*"I do."*)

Wedding vows are not simply a declaration of present love but a mutually binding promise of future love. Since it is your desire to be united as husband and wife, please indicate this by (joining your hands and) repeating in our presence your marriage covenant....

The Vows: "I, _____, take you, _____, to be my lawful wedded _____. To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer. I vow to be faithful in sickness and in health, in good times and bad, through all the changes of our lives. You are my love, my companion and my dearest friend. I will love and cherish you as long as we both shall live--to this I pledge my faith."

These vows establish a public covenant between husband and wife, as binding as the Biblical covenants made between God and His people; the word *covenant* indicates a relationship based on trust. At the heart of this bond is the exclusive promise and obligation of faithfulness. This pledge is sealed in the heart. The words spoken by

our bride and groom do not indicate a shallow promise but a solemn, lifelong commitment.

The Ring Exchange

Now, what token do you offer that you will keep this covenant and carry out these marriage vows? (“A ring.”)

The wedding ring is a symbol of marriage in at least 2 ways--the purity of the precious metal represents the purity of your love for each other and the richness of God’s gift of love that cannot diminish or fade with passing years. These rings also symbolize the unending circle of the vows which you have taken. They are an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, signifying to others that you have been united as one in Christ our Lord. As you give and receive your rings, please repeat after me:

(groom/bride) “With this ring I pledge my life and love to you, in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

(recipient) “I accept this ring as a symbol of our love for each other.”

For the rest of your lives may you continue to grow in your commitment and fidelity to each other, the sure evidence of God’s grace. (*hand upon their hands*) With these rings you have sealed your vows--before God, and to each other.

1 Corinthians 13, the “love chapter” (excerpt):

“If I speak with the eloquence of human speech and angelic as well, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I speak God’s word with power and, with full knowledge can comprehend all mysteries; and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but lack God’s love, I am nothing. If I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and surrender my body to the flames of martyrdom, but lack God’s love, I gain nothing. So no matter what I say, what I believe, or what I do, I am bankrupt without love. Love is always patient and kind; love is never envious or proud. It is not arrogant, self-seeking or rude, and does not act unbecomingly. Love is not easily angered, and so it keeps no record of wrongs. Love takes no

pleasure in unrighteousness, but delights in the flowering of truth. Love has unquenchable trust, hope, and endurance, through all circumstance--Love never fails... In the end, three qualities will last forever: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.”

Unity Candles (lit before the ceremony by the mothers of the couple; the middle candle is left unlit)

In lighting the unity candle, _____ & _____ are pledging themselves to new priorities and a determination to express an on-going unity and oneness in their new life together. They come from different families, backgrounds, and experiences, and have chosen to become one in holy matrimony. This act represents the blending of two lives (and two families) joined by our Triune God and Lord of all.

Couple kneels upon the kneeler. Holy Communion (optional), Special Music, and then the Prayer of Dedication...

Lord Jesus, You have loved us with an everlasting love so great that it demands our response. May _____ & _____'s love for each other be like Your love for them. As they take on new responsibilities, grant them warmth and understanding. Enable them to face life's challenges with sensitivity, patience, tolerance, humor, and wisdom. Help them to communicate with acceptance and discernment. In forming priorities, may they place each other's needs above their own. Above all, may they draw close to You, gracious Lord, so that their union may be strengthened and their lives transformed. Preserve this marriage by Your Spirit; regulate it by faithful adherence to Your word. Encourage this union through active participation in the fellowship of Your Church. This we ask, in Your thrice-holy Name, Amen. (*couple rises*)

Since you, _____, and you _____ have consented together in holy wedlock and have declared your love through the exchange of rings, the

joining of hands and the solemn taking of vows, I now pronounce you husband and wife in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

Now hear the counsel of the Apostle John, who declared: “Let us love one another, for love is from God...In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sin, making forgiveness possible. We love, because He first loved us.”

You may now kiss the bride!

The Benediction: May God, the best Maker of all marriages, combine your hearts in one. Now may the joy and peace which only our Heavenly Father can give, and which cannot be taken away by anything in this world, be yours today and in all of life’s tomorrows, Amen.

The Presentation: I would like to introduce to relatives and friends of the families, Mr. and Mrs. _____!

The Recessional (organist)

Renewal of Wedding Vows

-from First Corinthians 13, the “love chapter” of the Bible

Husband:

I will give to you
A love that is patient,
A love that is kind,
A love that endures.

Wife:

I vow to you
A love that is not jealous or possessive;
A love that is not proud or selfish;
A love that is not arrogant or inconsiderate.

Husband:

My love for you
Will not insist on its own way;
Will not be irritable or resentful;
Will keep no record of wrongs or failures;
My love will delight in the Truth.

Wife:

Our love will know
No limit to its endurance,
No end to its trust,
No fading of its hope.

Husband & Wife:

Our life together
Will have three great qualities--
Faith, Hope, and Love...
And the greatest of these is love.

• • •

Baptisms

A soldier stopped by the chapel one afternoon and asked me if I'd do a baptism for his newborn son. "Why don't you have it done where you go to church?" I asked, and he admitted he didn't attend church. I then asked, "Why do you want your son baptized?" The soldier replied bluntly, "To make sure that if he were to die he wouldn't go to Hell." I explained to him my understanding of the "age of accountability"; how until children understand what sin is, who God is, and why Jesus died, they are not held accountable; if they die, they go to Heaven, baptized or not. Then I added, "If your son were to die he'd go to Heaven... the question is: *Would you ever see him again?*"

As a civilian pastor, I received a phone call from a woman who reminded to me that I'd baptized her daughter five years ago, and now she has another child, and would I baptize him? She had not been attending church at all. I asked, "If you don't have any more children, will I never see you again?"

There are families who have their children baptized, who publicly promise that they will be active in church, and we never see them again. I feel bad about these parents, I want to see them mean what they say... but it's their obligation, their responsibility to keep their vows—not mine. I make clear their obligation as Christian parents. I realize that many people work on Sundays, but I strongly urge them to do everything possible to get an adjusted work schedule so they can spend at least a few Sundays a month in church. In the military we have an official policy of accommodating religious practices. We make sure the First Amendment rights of soldiers are upheld. We have a Constitutional right to worship; it's one of our basic freedoms as Americans. Committed Christians will make time to honor the Sabbath/Lord's Day.

Baptism is important, but it's not “fire insurance”. It's not something we do simply out of tradition or obligation. It's not an excuse to throw a party, or to get our spiritual “ticket punched”. The Apostle Paul writes, “We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body” (II Corinthians 12:2). When we receive Christ as our Savior, we are baptized into the body of believers—we become Christians; the Holy Spirit enters us. Water baptism of an infant anticipates saving faith and Spirit baptism, but does not guarantee that child will come to saving faith in Christ.

Baptism is an ordinance of the church. Christians differ on the meaning and mode of baptism, and some denominations choose to leave baptism to the discretion of individual churches. Good Christians differ on this teaching, and unfortunately baptism divides many Christians.

While I don't hold dogmatic beliefs about baby baptism or believers' baptism, one thing I maintain a strong conviction about is that *baptism doesn't save*. Some churches teach this. If this were so, we would want to make sure everyone is baptized. The problem is, a baptized atheist is still an atheist. I've heard of people who put off baptism till they were about to die, because they lived a sinful life and wanted to delay conversion till the last possible moment—as if baptism alone could

wash away their wicked past! Without faith the only thing that baptism will do is get you **wet**! Rituals do not save. Think of the thief on the cross who asked Jesus to save him; Jesus said “Today you will be with Me in paradise.” Yet this man was never baptized. Paul said he came preaching the Gospel, not baptizing—indicating that baptism was not part of the Gospel. Baptism does not save, nor does it change us. *It is not the power of water that saves, transforms us and gives us eternal life, but the power of God.*

The Greek word βαπτίζω can mean to dip, pour, immerse—hence we have various conflicting views on how much water we should use. The word does not refer to a mode, but to a process. The word also means “identification”; through baptism we identify with Christ. We embrace His teachings, and we accept His death and resurrection as payment for our sins. Regardless of the amount of water used, baptism shows that we are declaring that we belong to Christ; we are His disciples. With infant baptism, we are saying that as believers we are presenting our children—and ourselves—to the Lord. As parents, we’re asking God to bless this miraculous gift we’ve been entrusted with, and for the power to live as dedicated Christian parents. It is a solemn, sacred pledge.

Those who bring their children for baptism are not *making* their kids believers, especially when they’re yet unable to talk. They are instead making a public commitment, a promise to raise their children in a Christian home, in a spiritual environment. They are saying that they intend to pray with and for their child, to read them Christian books, play Christian music, teach the Bible and try to model Christian behavior. They are saying they intend to utilize the resources of the church as well, to actively participate in church. How else will their children hear the Gospel? It’s ludicrous to think that a few drops of water are all that is necessary. Baptizing a child is a lot like getting married; you’re saying before your friends that God is important to you, and you’re dedicating yourself to God. Time will tell if your words are just that—words, with no substance behind them.

Who should be baptized—believers, or the children of believers? I can see arguments for both, and frankly I'm not sure which position is correct. I personally lean toward baptizing believers by immersion. But if you want to follow Jesus, and if you want your home to be a place where your children can develop faith, with the Lord's help, your child's baptism can be the first chapter in a life of faith. The values our children are taught will help shape their character. Our beliefs determine our behavior. Without a solid faith, we are left to choose our own rules in life, to embrace false values, or to reject all authority. When we follow Jesus, we are given enough light to take the next step, and the power to live secure, effective, successful lives to the glory of God.

Sprinkling represents the Old Testament sprinkling of blood upon the altar of the Jewish Temple. Immersion points to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Regardless of the mode, the effect of baptism is the individual is set apart and identified as part of God's covenant community of faith. In the case of an infant, the family is introducing the child to their church family. The question has been raised, "Whose faith is required?" for baptism. Many churches believe that the faith of parents suffices for the baptism of their children. Jesus told His followers to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). Baptism begins the discipleship process, which continues throughout one's life.

Some couples ask me to perform a baby dedication, which I gladly do. A dedication is similar to a baptism, yet without water. Whether we dedicate or baptize our children, we are declaring our intent to raise them in a Christian home with the support of our church. We read how Samuel and Jesus were dedicated in the Jewish Temple, so there is precedent for such a practice.

We do not assume that baptized children will become Christians, and they do not have the full privileges of church membership until they make a credible confession

of faith. Confirmation helps clarify a young person's faith, but it also does not save anyone. The real confirmation is how we live after the classes are over. Confirmation gives older youth an opportunity to concur that they have trusted in Christ. Until then, they are urged to seek the Lord. God does not promise to save all who are baptized. He does promise to save all who possess the faith that baptism signifies. To have the sign is to have the promise, but not the condition of the promise. Faith is the condition for salvation.

Whether we baptize or dedicate our children, we are showing that we wish to be part of God's covenant community. The word *covenant* is a Biblical term, meaning a promise of a committed relationship. We covenant with God when we present our children and ourselves to Him. This is something which should not be entered into casually. It is a serious commitment. The Old Testament seal or sign of the covenant for children was circumcision; the New Testament seal is baptism. Baptism has replaced circumcision for the covenant community. Water was used in the Old Testament mikvah for ritual cleansing from spiritual impurity, a sign of repentance. We could say that in baptism we wish to have washed away all the things that stand between us and God.

Christian parents are the spiritual caretakers of their children. They bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord". Those who hold to infant baptism say the faith of parents qualifies children to be baptized and raised as disciples of Jesus. Jesus welcomed children into His Kingdom, and so should we.

For churches that offer infant baptism and baby dedications, there will be a stream of requests from people who wish to follow tradition but who have no intention of being part of the church. Even with adult baptisms the pastor needs to have an interview to determine the sincerity of the requestor. A baptism class is recommended as well, to ensure those requesting baptism understand the ordinance.

Here is a copy of a baptism application churches might use...

Application for Baptism or Dedication

Today's date of application _____

1) Request is for:

- ☐ Your child to receive (circle one): Baptism -or- Dedication
- ☐ You to receive baptism by (circle one): sprinkling -or- immersion

2) Schedule preferences:

- ☐ 1st Sunday date
preference: _____
- ☐ 2nd Sunday date
preference: _____

(Note: We do not normally schedule baptisms on Communion Sundays. Private baptisms are discouraged, as we prefer you'd want to share this with your church family. Due to our many major events around Christmas and Easter, we may be unable to schedule baptisms during these periods.)

3) Minister preference:

- ☐ No preference
- ☐ Rev _____

Note—the Deacon of the Month will be assisting in the ceremony/ordinance.

4) Information about the individual being baptized / dedicated:

Name _____
-Print name exactly as you want the name to appear on the Certificate

Date of Birth _____ Place of Birth _____

Father's Name _____
Print name exactly as you want it to appear on the certificate

Mother's Name _____
Print name exactly as you want it to appear on the certificate

Parents' Address: _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Are you members of our Church? _____ Father _____ Mother _____

If not, how long have you been attending? _____

If you are not presently attending, do you plan to attend our church? _____

Are you members of another church? If so, which one? _____

Have you read and agree with our Statement of Faith? _____

5) Names of Godparents:

Print names exactly as you want their names to appear on the Certificate

6) Approval (signature of Minister)

*Processing instructions: Applicants should fill out this form and bring it to the church office. The pastor will schedule the ceremony, arrange for a parental interview appointment, sign the approval, and coordinate with the Board of Deacons. After the ceremony, the Church Clerk will record the event in the ledger.

Information for those requesting a baptism or baby dedication:

- *Photos*--Photography during the ceremony is permitted. If possible, provide the church with a digital photo of the one being baptized, and it will appear in the church bulletin, on the actual certificate, and in our church newsletter.
- *Attire*--There are no dress requirements for those being baptized.
- *Bookkeeping*—Although the Church Clerk keeps records of baptisms in our church ledger, we do not maintain copies of the certificates. We recommend that you make a few copies and secure them with your important papers.
- *Scheduling*—There are seasonal times of the year when the church is especially busy, and we cannot always guarantee that we can do the baptism on the Sunday you'd most prefer. We'll do our best. We only schedule one baptism per worship service. We want to take our time with each child and not rush through; we don't want to look like an assembly line.
- *Participation*—Normally the parents, child, other children, and godparents stand before the congregation for the ceremony, but if there are others you'd like to have join you by the font for the baptism, that is fine with us.
- *Private ceremonies*—We believe that baptism is a very public commitment and we discourage private ceremonies. We may make exceptions on a case-by-case basis.
- *Reception*—If you are planning a reception away from the church afterwards, let the minister know if he is invited. You are welcome--though not obligated--to provide a sheet cake to mark the occasion for the fellowship time after church; please let us know if you're intending to do so.
- *Fees*—Our minister does not charge for baptisms, however you are certainly welcome to make a donation in honor of the occasion to the church.
- *Flowers*—You may also wish to dedicate the church flower arrangement that Sunday in honor of the one being baptized. The sign-up sheet for church flowers is in the fellowship hall. You are welcome to bring the flowers home with you.

To parents... *What is infant baptism?*

Is it “fire insurance”? A rite-of-passage? A ritual/procedure? Something people do out of a sense of tradition or obligation (to appease your relatives)? An excuse to have a party afterwards? A means of making sure their children will go to Heaven? Is it “*checking the block*”, a way of getting one’s spiritual ticket punched?

Baptism is many things...

- It is a way of introducing your child to your community of faith—your church family. As fellow parents, the people of our church are ready to encourage you and pray for you. They are good people to go to when the challenges of parenting are frustrating you. They’ve “been there,” and they care.
- It is a special dedication of your child, a way of asking God to bless this miraculous gift, this special individual you’ve been given.
- It is also a dedication of *yourselves* as parents. By bringing your child before the church for baptism, you are making a public commitment, a promise to raise your child in a Christian home, creating a spiritual environment. You’re saying that you intend to pray with and for your child, to read Christian books in your home, play Christian music, teach the Bible, and actively participate in your church (where you can grow as well).
- It publicly confirms your commitment to Christ. The faith of parents qualifies children to be baptized. By bringing your child to the waters of baptism, you are personally proclaiming your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. This profession is similar to your wedding vows—a solemn, serious, sacred pledge.
- It is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. However, baptism *does not save*, nor does it change us; it is not the power of water that saves, transforms us and gives us eternal life, but rather the power of God through faith. There is no magic in this ordinance. One translation of the word baptism means “identification”; we identify with the Lord Jesus Christ as His disciples.

We do not require you to be a member of our church... however, if you have no plans to be part of our church in any way, you may want to re-think why you're requesting baptism. If you're not committed to Christ and have no intention of becoming involved in any church, then the only thing a baptism accomplishes is this: your child gets wet. Rituals do not save, and our pastor is not merely a *religious service provider*.

If you want to follow Jesus, with His help your child's baptism can be the first chapter in an exciting journey of faith. The values your child learns will shape his/her character. Our beliefs determine our behavior. You are your child's spiritual caretakers. Without a religious upbringing, children are left to choose their own rules in life, or to reject all authority. A few drops of water alone will not ensure that your child will mature into a virtuous person of faith. However, when we follow Jesus, we are given direction – enough light to take the next step, and the power to live secure, effective, successful lives for God's glory.

Service of Infant Baptism...

“Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these’. Then He placed His hands on their heads and blessed them” (Matthew 19:14-15).

Pastor: Joseph and Mary took the infant Jesus to the Temple and dedicated Him to God; in similar fashion, _____ and _____ have brought their son/daughter, _____ before God for baptism in the hope that his/her life might be lived according to God's eternal plan. _____ is a special child, a miraculous gift. This ordinance of baptism today is also for _____ and _____. They are dedicating themselves as Christian parents, committed to Christ, His church, and His will for their family. Theirs is a solemn, serious, sacred pledge.

_____ cannot express faith in Christ this day; his/her life is like un-molded clay that you will shape by what you teach and by how you live. Whether he/she comes to

saving faith in Christ and lives as His follower depends in part on the prayers and teaching of her parents, grandparents, and the influence of her extended family, this church. So I now ask _____ & _____:

Do you now promise to raise your son/daughter in a Christ-centered home as his/her spiritual caretakers, where by instruction and example, and your participation in church, God's word will be communicated, so that the love of our Heavenly Father is clearly revealed, and His will made known, in order that your son/daughter may grow in faith, to the glory of God?

Parents: Yes, by the grace of God, we make our solemn pledge.

Pastor: You who stand as Godparents, do you promise to assist _____ and _____ as they seek to carry out their vows, and will you faithfully encourage them and pray for them?

Godparents: By the grace of God, we will.

Church covenant (*Members in Unison*): As part of your extended church family, we rejoice and join with you in the holy covenant you have made this day on behalf of your son/daughter. We recognize our relationship to you and your family as a sacred responsibility of our church. Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to empower us, we promise to make every effort to encourage you, _____ & _____, and we hope that through our joint efforts, and as you participate in our fellowship, _____ will increase in his/her knowledge of God and choose to live for Him. We celebrate and rejoice with you this special day!

The Baptism of _____ and presentation to the church.

Presentations from the Pastor, Deacons, and Christian Education Director

Baby Dedication

Pastor: “Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these’. Then He placed His hands on their heads and blessed them.” (Matthew 19:14-15).

Joseph and Mary took the infant Jesus to the Temple and dedicated Him to God; in similar fashion, Matt and Pam are dedicating their sons Ty and John in the hope that their lives might be lived according to God’s eternal plan. The psalmist writes, “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from Him.”

Father: Oh that our children might live before Thee, O Lord.

Mother: For these children I have prayed, and I praise You, O Lord, the Giver of life.

Father and Mother: We dedicate our children...

Father: They remind us of the sanctity and goodness of life.

Father and Mother: We dedicate our children...

Mother: They teach us lessons of humility, trust, love, and hope.

Father and Mother: We dedicate our children...

Father: For the work of extending God’s Kingdom on earth, by His grace and power.

Father and Mother: We dedicate our children...

Mother: For God’s glory, His service, His pleasure.

Father and Mother: We dedicate our children.

Pastor: *Let us pray...* Good shepherd, Who carries the lambs in Your arms, anoint these parents for the sacred task of training their children. Grant them patience, tenderness, consistency, and firmness. May _____ follow Jesus, and may their lives bring praise to You; this we ask, in our Savior’s Name, Amen.

Adult Baptismal Service...

Once we admit that we're sinners and we turn to Christ for salvation, the Bible says the watching world needs to know. Baptism has always stood as a kind of public display for people who have moved from being a seeker to being a believer.

Baptism proclaims an outward sign of an inward work of grace. It confirms the new birth and is a public confession that Jesus is Lord. Baptism celebrates the beginning of our lives as Christians. Baptism follows the example of Christ and proclaims that we've asked God to apply the benefits of the shed blood of Christ to our lives, to remove the stain of our sin. The waters of baptism do not wash away sin; they instead represent a washing that has already taken place. This church ordinance signifies that the person being baptized has come to Christ in faith and repentance. Those who have trusted Christ are initially baptized by the Holy Spirit into the fellowship of all believers. Baptism alone does not save. If it did, we might baptize scores of unbelievers, "making" them Christians. It is the power of God that transforms us, not the power of water.

Frederick Buechner writes that "Going under the waters of baptism symbolizes the end of everything about your life that is less than human... coming up again symbolizes the beginning in you of something strange and new and hopeful. You can breathe again."

The Apostle Paul describes the significance of baptism in Romans 6: "When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land! That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country" (*the Message*).

_____, you have come for baptism in response to the call of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Do you confess your faith in one God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit, taking the Father to be your Lord, the Son to be your Savior, the Spirit to be your Guide? *(I do)*.

_____, Do you accept the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and have you trusted the finished work of Jesus, God-the-Son, in your behalf, for forgiveness of sin? *(I have)*

Is it your desire demonstrate your faith by living for Jesus, seeking to know and do His will, as His disciple? *(It is)*

To the Congregation: As a community of faith, do you promise to support _____, sharing the gift of God's love revealed in Christ? And will you encourage *him/her* to grow in the way of Christ, and to serve Him in the world?
(We do with God's help)

In accordance with the Scriptures, as a minister of the Gospel, and upon your profession of faith, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You are buried with Christ in baptism, and raised to walk in newness of life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You humbled Yourself and were baptized for those for whom You would die. We trust in Your mercy alone for salvation, and thank You for redeeming us through Your shed blood. Confirm and strengthen _____ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that *he/she* may be Your servant in this world and see Your glory in the world to come... "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-26). Amen.

• • •

Funerals

This is something that is rarely taught in seminary. The first funeral I ever attended I conducted, and I had no idea what to say. I cobbled something together. Seminary did not teach me what to do. It wasn't until I attended the US Army Chaplain School Basic Officer Course that I learned how to conduct a funeral. It is vital that pastors know how to minister to people in times of grief. Even the un-churched realize the need for ritual when a loved one dies. You have an opportunity to help begin the healing process. Some suggestions...

- Funerals take a Pastor's top priority. Stop whatever you're doing and go to the family.
- After giving initial condolences, ask the family if they've made arrangements with a local funeral home.
- Contact the police only if a violent death (including suicide) is suspected.
- The major issue is the family's welfare; meaning they make the decisions about the funeral, but they may need some guidance if they're especially confused or overwhelmed.
- Although the deceased may have left instructions, the service is for those surviving, and their needs are paramount. Some people say they do not want a funeral, but the service is not for them... *they won't be there.*
- Provide the family follow-up materials.
- You may need to contact people in the church to help out with meals or transportation. Some churches have a funeral committee to assist with or arrange the collation.
- Contact the board of elders/deacons—they should attend the wake and/or funeral.
- Contact the Church Clerk if the individual was a church member.
- Email everyone in the church informing them of the hours of the wake and funeral, and location of the collation. Don't assume they will read the newspaper obituary page.

- For church funerals, contact the Sexton/custodian immediately. The funeral home should pay the Sexton for preparing the church sanctuary.
- The family may want you to accompany them to the funeral home to be with them as they make arrangements, even if they have made pre-arrangements.
- The funeral home sends in the obituary, sets up the flowers, and arranges for military honors.
- The average wake is 2-4 pm & 7-9 pm; all-night vigils are discouraged.
- Sometimes a pastor will do an informal service at the wake, an abbreviated time of Scripture, prayers, and possibly music.
- Encourage someone from the family or a close friend to offer words of remembrance, a eulogy. If no one feels they can get through one, offer to read something they put together... especially if you do not know the deceased. Otherwise the best you can offer is a “generic” and impersonal funeral service.
- At the funeral, never say you did not know the deceased, and do not pretend you knew him/her.
- Encourage the family to bring in pictures of the deceased. If the individual had a special interest or hobby, they could bring in objects showing their loved one’s handiwork.
- The former minister should be contacted, and may wish to send along written condolences, to be read at the service.
- Should time permit, a worship bulletin can be useful, with readings and lyrics of hymns (funeral homes do not supply hymnals), along with information about the collation, names of pallbearers, and a photo of the deceased.
- Get to know the people who work at your local funeral home; you will need to establish a good working relationship with them.
- Usually ministers ride in the hearse to the cemetery, though some funeral homes may prefer they use their own automobile.

- Regardless of the spiritual condition of the deceased, the minister's task is to offer the Good News of hope to the living. You may have little hope for the deceased; don't destroy or invent any.
- Music often speaks to people on a level that words cannot. If someone can come and play a keyboard or guitar, and/or sing, this can communicate great comfort during the service.
- At the graveside service, you may want to encourage people to take with them a flower from the many arrangements present, as a keepsake/remembrance.
- If a military honor guard is present, the rendering of honors occurs after the religious portion of the graveside service.
- The day after the funeral, write a note to the family, then visit a week later.
- Put a note in the Sunday worship bulletin about the individual's passing, and let whoever prepares the parish newsletter know.

Appropriate Hymns for Funerals and Memorial Services

For All The Saints

When All My Labors and Trials are O'er

I am Bound for the Promised Land

Be Still My Soul

Amazing Grace

In the Garden

How Great Thou Art

Abide With Me

Going Home

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want

Blessed Assurance

Softly and Tenderly

Great is Thy Faithfulness

In Christ Alone
The Old Rugged Cross
It Is Not Death to Die
Be Thou My Vision
Day by Day and With Each Passing Moment
To God Be the Glory
God Be With You Till We Meet Again
Just a Closer Walk With Thee
O God Our Help In Ages Past
It Is Well With My Soul
In This Very Room
He is our Peace
Beyond the Sunset
My Jesus I Love Thee
Here I am, Lord
His Eye is on the Sparrow
On Eagles' Wings
Rock of Ages
What Wondrous Love is This
O That Will be Glory

Funeral checklist for Clergy

Name of deceased _____

Nickname? _____ Age _____

Occupation(s) _____

Church affiliation _____

Veteran? _____ Branch _____ Combat? _____

Rank _____ Member of VFW/Legion/DAV? _____

Will there be military honors at the graveside? _____

Next of Kin _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Address _____

Funeral Home _____

Date/time/place of wake _____

Date/time/place of funeral _____

Graveside service _____

Collation _____

Music for service _____

Solo/Musician(s) _____

Eulogist(s) _____

Reader(s) _____

Other clergy participating? _____

Readings _____

Donations in memory to _____

Number of Bulletins _____ Digital photo for bulletin? _____

Eulogies

It is difficult for people to give a eulogy, so you may be asked to give one. To personalize the service it is very helpful, even therapeutic, for loved ones and friends to say a few words. I give the next of kin a copy of these guidelines:

Preparing a Eulogy...

Funerals and Memorial services can seem impersonal if we leave out the details of the departed one's life. It is helpful to everyone to hear a meaningful eulogy, a celebration of the deceased individual's life. The following guidelines are intended to assist your preparation. Consider putting together the eulogy as a group project. You may even wish to turn on a tape recorder to capture the spontaneous sharing and reflections. Then determine who will speak. It's perfectly fine if several wish to say something. It is not unusual or inappropriate to get choked up while speaking—if you “lose it” don't apologize; simply pause, take a few deep breaths, recognize that your difficulty in speaking and your grief are understandable, then continue. We expect you to feel the pain of your loss, and a service is an appropriate place to express your grief.

While putting together the facts, consider the following:

- What one adjective would you use to describe him/her?
- Did he/she have any particular interests or hobbies?
- Did he/she enjoy any particular songs, poems, or Scriptures? (for example, a favorite Bible verse)
- What one value or lesson did he/she most want to teach the next generation?
- What one achievement or accomplishment would make his/her eyes light up when you mentioned it?
- What was the theme or focus of his/her life?
- What were some of his/her favorite phrases or sayings?
- Did he/she like his/her first name? Did he/she have any nicknames?
- Was there a cause or movement that he/she felt deeply about and supported with time and finances? (for example, the Boy Scouts, world hunger, church, civic organizations)
- Did he/she ever put something up on the wall—a picture, motto, clipping—that expressed who he/she really was?

- Why do you think this world is a little different because of him/her?
- If he/she could have you say one thing during the memorial service, what do you think it would be?
- What incident/occurrence/event could be considered a highlight of his/her life? (for example the birth of a child, participation in war, an achievement in work or church)
- How did he/she touch your life?

Ask people at the viewing/wake to write down some of their memories of your loved one. You may wish to *write out* your eulogy, or at least prepare an outline for your remarks, in order to better organize your thoughts. Your minister would be glad to review your eulogy and offer any suggestions. You may wish to practice your remarks a day before the service. Sharing your thoughts will make the service will be more meaningful and will help start the healing process. The *focus* of a funeral/memorial service is God, and the comfort He offers during times of grief and loss. The goal is to communicate hope to those attending, and to make the service the start of the healing process.

-Note: After the eulogies, I usually say: “The rest of the eulogies will be after the graveside service, when we’re sharing memories over coffee.” I say this to help those who wanted to say a few words, but knew it was too hard to do so. We shouldn’t want anyone to feel guilty for not giving a eulogy.

Sample services:

Wake service at the funeral home:

We gather in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Scripture Reading: I Peter 1:3-9

“All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into a priceless inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in Heaven for us, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this we greatly rejoice, though now for a little while we may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that our faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. Though we have not seen Him, we love Him; and even though we do not see Him now, we believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for we are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.”

Prayer: Eternal Lord, the balance of our lives has shifted; the world feels out of tune. We are learning again, Father, what loss feels like. Death seems so final; help us God to see that it is *not*. We've seen a loved one weaken and succumb to illness. Help us to picture _____ in Your presence, glowing with health and vigor, and full of joy... and not a scene of clouds and harps, but in a Heaven too splendid for human language to adequately describe. We pray in the Name of Jesus, Who experienced death for us, and Who taught us to pray, saying (*Lord's Prayer*)

Poem: “*What Will Matter*”

Someday it will all come to an end. There will be no more sunrises, hours or days. All the things we collected, whether treasured or forgotten, will pass to someone else. Our wealth, fame, and influence will pass.

It won't matter what we owned or owed. Our plans and to-do lists will be over. Our wins and losses that seemed so important will fade away.

So what *will* matter? How will the worth of our days be measured?

What will matter is not what we acquired but what we gave.

What will matter is not our success but our significance.

What will matter is not what we learned but what we taught.

What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, and sacrifice that enriched, empowered, or encouraged others.

What will matter is not our competence but our character.

What will matter is not our resume but our faith, and the memories that live in those who love us.

Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident; it happens by God's Providence.

Meditation: How *long* we live isn't as important as *how* we live. When we are governed by faith, death is no longer an issue. We remain vulnerable, but we are confident that in death we will transition from our present life to eternal life with God. Death is a doorway. Those who have died are actually alive—more alive than we are. There are better things ahead than any we leave behind. Death is not “the end” but “to be continued.” And so with trust in God, we move from fear to faith.

Benediction: Now may the God of peace, Who, through His eternal covenant, brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His work. May He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for ever and ever--Amen.

Funeral service—Gospel Hope (one appropriate for the un-churched):

Greeting: We gather in the Name of our Compassionate God, to honor the memory of _____. The Lord Jesus, our Wounded Healer, declared:

“I am the Resurrection and the Life. All who believe in Me, even though they die, yet shall they live; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die...Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father's house there are many dwelling places. I am going there to prepare a place for you...I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you, not as the world gives.”

May God grant us the faith to trust Him...
So that in our *pain* we may find comfort;
In our *sorrow*, hope;
and in *death* the certainty of resurrection and everlasting life.

Prayer: Holy Lord, Author of Life--Hold us in faith, though we are lost in grief. You have not promised us a life free from sorrow, but one in which joy will have the last word. In our grief, if we can't find words to pray, perhaps our tears can be our prayer. Healer of our souls, deliver us from despair. The world offers only a hopeless end, but You hold out endless hope, and a better world to all who wish to live in Your light. Help us to rest in You... Amen.

Eulogies/words of remembrance

Poem by Ann Weems

O God, find me! I am lost in the valley of grief, and I cannot see my way out. My friends call me to leave this valley, but I cannot follow the faint sound of their voices. Their words fade and vanish in the wind. They knock, but I cannot find the door. They shout to me, but I cannot find the voice to answer.

O God, find me! Come into this valley and bring me out of this land of weeping. I will wait here, for you have never failed to come to me. I will wait here, for you have always been faithful. I will wait here, for you are my God. And if I watch and wait, I will see Your hand putting the stars back in the sky, one-by-one.

Music--Solo or Congregational song

Scripture reading from I Corinthians 15, the *Resurrection chapter*

"I pass on to you what is most important—Christ died for our sins. He was buried, and was raised from death on the third day... Here a wonderful mystery: We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an

eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. Death will be swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O grave, is your sting? It was sin and guilt that made death so frightening. In a single stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God who gives us victory!”

Message

There are many ways to handle death. For those without faith, death is **final**; it ends everything. Hopeless people stand around and talk about the past. People of faith are confident that there will be a future, that death is not “*the end*” but “*to be continued*.” They talk about what’s yet to come. They think more of what their loved one has gained than what they themselves have lost.

If life has meaning and purpose, then so does death. It opens a door to a new life, a new beginning. Death is not our final destination. Those who trust in God never die a godforsaken death. Because the Gospel is true, “terminal” is transitional.”

Many of us, in our secular culture of comfort and denial, do not know how to prepare for dying, but that’s something we should do every day. We may have compiled a folder filled with important papers to help our surviving loved ones, but what have we done for *ourselves*? When we say “yes” to God, we are learning how to die.

When we open our Bibles and learn what Jesus did for us and what Scripture says about life after death, it changes everything. Death is either the worst or best thing that can happen to us. We can see death as God’s warm embrace, taking us home. If we are seeking God, trusting Him, death is an arrival, a promotion, a celebration. The Christian message is that death and dark are *not* the end... life and light are the end. The best is yet to come.

John Newton, composer of the hymn “*Amazing Grace*”, said on his deathbed: “I am still in the land of the dying; I will soon be in the land of the living.” Author C.S. Lewis says that “Heaven is a story in which every chapter is better than the one before. Joy

is the life and business of Heaven. There are better things ahead than anything we leave behind.”

We have hope beyond the grave because of the One who conquered death. The cross and empty tomb provide the foundation of a new world in which our greatest enemy, death, is defeated. Death has no dominion over our risen Lord and Savior. Death has no more dominion over those He delivers. Jesus is the answer to all the concerns people have about the brevity and frailty of life. His sacrificial death reveals God placing Himself under His own sentence--the death that should have been ours, the only sufficient price. Jesus died *for us, because of us, and in place of us*--a victory over sin that holds open the door to Heaven and eternal life. *Let us pray...*

Prayer: Lord of time and eternity, we acknowledge Your love. May today begin the process of healing, and may we face tomorrow with confidence in Your loving plan. Help us to embrace the gift of new life You’ve offered through Your Son. Each day brings us closer to home. Cause us to trust You each step of the way. Comfort us until we reach the shore of unceasing praise. Amen.

Benediction: May there be granted you... Courage for every challenge, Wisdom for every decision, Strength for every trial, Resolve for every temptation, Faith for every care, and Joy for every victory... for the glory of our God, Who is our Shield and Refuge.

Funeral Service for church members:

Greeting: We gather in the Name of our Compassionate God, to honor the memory of _____. The Lord Jesus, our Wounded Healer, declared:

“I am the Resurrection and the Life. All who believe in Me, even though they die, yet shall they live; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die...Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father's house there are many dwelling places. I am going there to prepare a place for you...I am the Way, the

Truth, and the Life...Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you, not as the world gives.”

Poem

Birth is a beginning, and death a destination, and life is a journey:

From childhood to maturity, from youth to age, from innocence to awareness, from ignorance to knowing; from folly to wisdom. It is a journey from weakness to strength, and from health to illness; from pain to forgiveness, from loneliness to love, from grief to understanding...from fear to faith.

Birth is a beginning, and death a destination, and life is a journey: A sacred journey to life everlasting.

Music—solo or congregational hymn

Eulogies, words of remembrance

Scripture reading... from Revelation 22, a vision of Heaven and eternity; John the Apostle writes: “An angel showed me a pure river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the middle of the great street of the holy city... No longer will anything be cursed... we will see God’s face, and His name will be on our foreheads. There will be no night there—no need for lamps or the sun—for the Lord will shine on us.”

Meditation

I have one key message for this occasion: **“It’s not over.”**

I’m not referring to our grief. Our sense of loss will continue, and most people say that the first year is the hardest: experiencing the holidays, birthdays, anniversaries... and then one begins to gradually feel the pain less frequently. We will miss _____, but we have the assurance that we will see him/her again in his/hers and our true home.

Imagine a world where you’ll never have to attend a funeral! To our earth-bound minds, Heaven is an abstract concept, a place completely foreign to us. By faith we accept the reality of this spiritual realm, but it’s difficult to imagine what Heaven must be like. The Bible only gives us hints, and its descriptions appear in the form of

poetry and symbolism. Galileo observed, “The intention of God is not to teach us how Heaven goes, but how one goes to Heaven.” The glories will far surpass our perception. Heaven is a real place, and the reality will exceed all images and symbols. Heaven is a Reality inaccessible to any of our senses. To describe Heaven is like trying to explain this world to an unborn baby.

Some things will be *missing* in Heaven—There will be no death, no pain, no sin, no curse, no tears. God declares through the prophet Jeremiah: “I will turn your mourning into gladness, your weeping into laughter, lavishing comfort, invading your grief with joy” (31:13). Heaven is like a story in which every chapter gets better than the one before. The injustices and deprivations of earthly life will be fully and forever corrected. Every wrong will be righted. In Heaven we will be liberated from every loss. We will find Heaven a place where the Lord’s Prayer is finally fulfilled—where God’s Name is hallowed, His Kingdom is come, His will is done. The hope of Heaven gives us confidence beyond this present world.

Heaven has been called “*a prepared place for prepared people.*” Jesus said He is preparing a place for us in His Father’s house (John 14). For some people, the idea of Heaven may not seem very inviting. Heaven is in the eye of the beholder. Only those who care about Jesus would be happy in such a place, living with Him for eternity.

And some people don’t feel at ease here on earth. C.S. Lewis noted, “If nothing in this world satisfies me, perhaps it is because I was made for another world.” If we’re uncomfortable here, it’s because we’re *not home yet*.

Heaven is a substantial place. We picture it as clouds in the sky, yet Heaven is more substantive, more solid, *more real* than life on earth. The author of Hebrews describes Heaven as a “city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (11:10). People most often define success in terms of money, fame, power. True success is arriving in Heaven.

Heaven is a place of fellowship and reunion. We'll be reunited with loved ones, and meet saints from history. The highest reward of Heaven is to be with God. We will see God. Our supreme joy will be God's holy presence.

Followers of Jesus are defined by our destiny as "citizens of Heaven" (Phil 3:20). We're not citizens of earth trying to get to Heaven but citizens of Heaven making our way through this world. For those of us who've been transformed through faith in Christ, Heaven is truly a wonderful place. Heaven is more than a comfort for believers—it's a **promise**.

Closing Prayer

God Almighty, we close this service with trust in Your promises and faith in Your ability to give us hope and heal our suffering. We are neither overwhelmed by loss nor drowning in despair. Nonetheless, we seek Your strength in the approaching days as we struggle to deal with our loss, and we know You will walk with us. We trust You even though we don't understand fully Your timing or purpose. We know You love us and so we thank You for the gift of life, and the promise of life eternal through Your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus, in Whose Name we pray, Amen.

Benediction

We believe that beyond absence there is a presence;
That beyond our pain there can be healing;
That beyond the brokenness there can be wholeness;
That beyond the hurt there may be peace;
That beyond the silence there may be insight;
That beyond futility there can be confidence;
That beyond the awful words "*the end*" there is more;
That beyond grief there is hope.
Let us go in peace.

Graveside Service:

Imagine...

...stepping onto a shore and finding it Heaven;
...taking hold of a hand and finding it God's hand;
...breathing fresh new air and finding it's celestial air;
...feeling invigorated and finding it's immortality;
...passing from storm and tempest to an unknown calm;
...waking and discovering that you're home.

We gather at this place of rest and remembrance to say farewell, but not a final farewell. Death is not the end, and the grave does not have the final word. Because our Savior lives--because He conquered death--we shall live also. God's grace is sufficient for us, and His promises are steadfast. John Newton, composer of our hymn Amazing Grace, said on his deathbed: "I am still in the land of the dying; I will soon be in the land of the living." And C.S. Lewis said, "There are better things ahead than anything we leave behind."

In the beginning of the Apostle Paul's 2nd letter to the followers of Christ in Corinth, he offers these words of hope:

"We praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, our Messiah. Praise to the Father of all mercy, the God of all healing counsel. He comes alongside us and comforts us when we experience hardship, so that we can comfort others with the same comfort we've received. We can be there for others just as He was there for us."

Prayer: Holy Father, You are our refuge, our help, our hiding place. We come to say a temporary farewell to _____, with the firm conviction that death is not the end but our final stage of growth. It is not easy to say goodbye, but we come to this graveside with the reassurance of Your love for us, knowing that one day we all will stand together before You. We thank You for the precious gift of _____'s life, in

the Name of Christ, our compassionate, Wounded Healer, Who taught us to pray, saying: (*Lord's Prayer*).

Faith is In times of grief our faith is tested. Pamela Reeve wrote a book in which she explains what faith is all about. Here are a few of her definitions:

- “Faith is depending on the fact that God is love, not on my ability to figure out WHY, in the midst of sorrow.”
- “Faith is not a vague hope in a happy hereafter, but an assurance of heaven based on my trust in Christ’s death as payment for my sins.”
- “Faith is leaving the future to the God Who controls the future.”
- “Faith is trusting God’s final outcome when all I’d dreamed about for my loved one is shattered.”
- “Faith is believing in the midst of suffering and loss that God will be enough; that He will enable me to make it through.”
- “Faith is living with the unexplained.”
- “Faith is drawing comfort from the knowledge that when I weep, God weeps with me.”

Group reading of the Shepherd Psalm / Psalm 23 (Note: Use the familiar KJV)

Poem: “*The Day God Called You Home*”

God looked around his Garden and found an empty place.
He then looked down upon His earth and saw your loving face.
He put His arms around you and lifted you to rest.
His Garden must be beautiful, He always takes the best.
He knew that you were suffering, He knew you were in pain.
And knew that you would never get well on earth again.
He saw your path was difficult, He closed your tired eyes,
He whispered to you "Peace be thine" and gave you wings to fly.

When we saw you sleeping so calm and free of pain,
We would not wish you back to earth to suffer once again.
You've left us precious memories, your love will be our guide,
You live on through your children, you're always by our side.
It broke our hearts to lose you, but you did not go alone.
For part of us went with you on the day God called you home.

Committal Prayer: Thrice-holy Lord, we tenderly commit _____ to the shelter of Your care. We count on Your assurance from Scripture that to be absent from our mortal bodies means to dwell eternally in Your presence. We rely on Jesus, Who rose from the grave and conquered death. Because He took our punishment on the cross, we can choose to receive His gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Because of Jesus, death is no longer our fearful enemy. Encourage us, and help us encourage one another...in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—Amen.

Benediction:

May God bring us through darkness into His light; through pain into peace; through death into life. Death has done all that death can do. God who gives beginning gives the end...a rest for broken things too broke to mend. Life is a pilgrimage, and death is an arrival, a celebration. Death is a beginning, a doorway, an arrival. Death does not win. All glory to God, who is our hope, our strength, our song, our salvation. Amen.

Graveside service for Veterans:

We gather to honor the memory of one who served his/her country and family well. In times of parting, we trust the God of all mercy, Who comforts us in times of sorrow so that we can comfort others. His grace is sufficient for us, and His promises are steadfast.

David, the warrior-king, proclaimed in Psalm 144: “Blessed be the Lord, my rock, Who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle...God is my fortress, my stronghold, my deliver, my shield in whom I take refuge.”

The Apostle Paul writes, “The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for His appearing. The Lord will bring me safely to His heavenly Kingdom.” (II Tim 4)

Poem: I was that which others did not want to be. I went where others feared to go, and did what others failed to do. I accepted the burden of loneliness; I have seen the face of terror and felt the stinging cold of fear. I have felt pain and sorrow, but most of all, I have lived times others could not fathom. At the end of my days, I am able to say that I am proud of who I am—a (Soldier/Airman/Sailor/Marine/Coast Guardsman).

Prayer: Lord God, we draw comfort from knowing that You care deeply about all our pain. Grant us faith to live with mysteries we cannot explain, and give us hope for tomorrow. Thank You for the gift of Your Son, who experienced death for us, and offers the gift of eternal life. Cause us to trust and rely upon You for strength and healing, for You are our refuge. We pray in Your thrice-holy Name, Amen.

Group reading of Psalm 23

The (Soldier’s) Creed: I am an American (Soldier/Airman/Sailor/Marine/Coast Guardsman). I am a Warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States and live my Branch values. I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade. I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills. I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself. I am an expert and I am a professional. I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the

United States of America in close combat. I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life. I am an American _____.

Committal: To everything there is a season... There is a time to weep. We commit _____ to the earth--ashes to ashes, dust to dust, yet knowing that death is not the end of life. The grave does not have the last word. We rest in the care of the Good Shepherd, who will never let us go. He gave His life for His sheep.

Poem: I heard the sound of Taps one night, when everything was still; I listened to the bugler play, and felt a sudden chill. I wondered just how many times, Taps had meant "Amen," when a flag had covered a coffin, of a brother or a friend. I thought of all the children, of the mothers and the wives; of fathers, sons and husbands—with interrupted lives. And I thought about the graveyard, at the bottom of the sea; of unmarked graves at Arlington--No, Freedom is not free.

Benediction: May the hope from God that never dies; the promise that never fades, the inheritance that can never perish, the faith that removes uncertainty, and the love that casts out fear--be with us now and always. Amen.

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Holy Communion

Communion procedure

Many Protestant churches observe the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of the month. The Pastor leads the observance with the assistance of the Board of Deacons, who help serve the elements. Occasionally Communion is served at for shut-ins, at weddings and funerals, at the request of the families.

The Communion Steward (a deacon) prepares the elements and sets up the table. Churches need to determine whether to use wine or grape juice, wafers, matzo, or some other form of unleavened bread (some use leavened).

There is room for variety, even innovation. Some pastors prefer to write a different liturgy for every observance, to keep the ordinance fresh, and to keep it from being mechanical. Some churches practice Intinction, where congregants come forward to the Table and dip bread in a common cup. Many churches are providing gluten-free bread. Some offer home-baked bread; some use matzo. Most Protestants practice Open Communion—all who’ve trusted Christ as Savior & Lord are welcome at His table. Most do not “fence” the Table. Some churches simply have a table where congregants can at any time go and partake, without any words of institution (I don’t care for this at all).

Many churches have an annual class for the Sunday School children explaining the meaning of Communion, answering any questions; and with parental permission, they serve the children, going over the significance of the procedure. This observance is more instructional than worshipful in nature. Some churches practice paedocommunion, where even the youngest children are welcome. Most Protestant churches trust parents to decide when their children are ready to partake. Young children not sitting with their parents should not be served.

At the beginning of the observance, the Pastor calls the serving deacons forward, and begins the opening Eucharistic remarks and invitation to the Lord’s Table. Often there is a responsive reading in the bulletin and/or a creed to recite together prior to the liturgy of the Bread & Cup. We respect the need for ritual but strive to keep the observance meaningful. Communion becomes an opportunity to convey many truths concerning the finished work of Christ.

After the Pastor’s invitation to the Table is the liturgy of the Bread. When two ministers are serving, they have the freedom to make remarks and quote Scripture verses as they deem appropriate. The Pastor concludes the remarks by offering the bread to all, hands the trays to the deacons serving, then sits down. A deacon serves the Pastor and co-celebrant assisting, and while the congregation is being served the elements the organist plays and often sings. Some churches offer the congregation

one element at a time, not together, and always the Bread first, then the Cup, following the order in the Gospel narratives.

When the deacons are finished serving the congregation, they line up in the back of the church, which signals to the Pastor to come to the table. This movement signals the deacons to return to the Table. The minister(s) receives the trays, and then serves the deacons. Sometime the deacons stand, sometimes they are seated.

The Pastor gives the “words of institution”, often quoting familiar Scriptures. While in some churches people consume the elements as soon as they are received, others partake together. The Pastor or co-celebrant signals this by slightly raising the bread or cup and inviting all to eat/drink. Usually the remarks also signal that it is time to eat/drink—for example: “Let us remember the atoning sacrifice of our Savior as we drink... The body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven, broken for us.” (No bells!)

The liturgy of the Cup is similar to the Bread. There is a chalice on the table, but we do not drink from a common cup; like the loaf, it is there for effect. After receiving the trays and serving the deacons, the Pastor replaces the lids, and then proceeds with inviting the congregation to drink the cup, which all do together. The Pastor may conclude with prayer or proceed directly to the closing hymn.

Our intention should be to convey reverence and awe as we remember the cost of our salvation in a sacred event that requires our involvement in an enacted parable. In Communion we remember who we are and Whose we are. Every time we partake we hopefully gain a greater appreciation of the Person and Work of Christ... to the glory of God.

A sample Communion Service

Invitation: In the church ordinance of Communion, we find ourselves joining the disciples in the Upper Room. We are united with Jesus as He prays in Gethsemane and Stands before Caiaphas and Pilate. We’re not asked simply to affirm our belief in

Christ's sacrificial death... we're asked to **do something**. We can't passively sit; we have to make a choice, to receive or refuse, to partake or refrain, to participate or to sit this one out. Doing it, says it.

As we prepare for the Lord's Table, let's recite our historic statement of faith, the *Apostles' Creed*. "Christians, what do you believe?"

The Bread

He who is the Bread of Life began His ministry hungering.

He who is the Water of Life ended His ministry thirsting.

He was weary, yet He is our rest.

He wept, and He dries our tears.

He was sold for 30 pieces of silver, yet He redeems sinners.

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd.

He gave His life, and by dying He destroyed death.

The original meaning of the word "companion" is "*those who eat bread together*".

We are companions at the Lord's Table. Communion is something we do together.

We take bread, break and bless it, and contemplate the broken body of our Savior.

We participate in Communion. We listen to the choir and the pastor's sermon, but

Communion is an action, something we do ourselves. Let's focus on Christ as we receive His bread, and what His sacrifice means to us. Ministering unto you in Jesus Name, receive the Bread of life. (*Deacons distribute the bread*)

When we stretch forth our hands to receive the broken bread, we are confessing that we cannot live by bread alone, that we are in need of our Savior. We remember Christ's brokenness upon the cross as we eat. (*We partake together*)

The Cup

The scholar says education is the answer;

The politician says that government is the answer;

The unrepentant sinner says that self-indulgence is the answer;

Satan says there is no answer;

Jesus says, “***I am the Answer.***”

We find our answers to life and death in Christ. He is both the Goal of our journey and the Companion of our way. Receive the cup of the New Covenant that recalls for us our Savior’s sacrifice for sin. (*Deacons distribute the cup*)

Taking the elements of Communion is a choice to receive the benefits of the Cross. It is an action we take that aligns us with Jesus--His teaching, His sorrow, His victory. We are affirming with our bodies, our senses, the self-giving, sacrificial love of Christ. Let us now receive the cup. (*We all partake*)

Here is a **blessing** for you all:

As people who have been fed, go now to feed the world.

As those who have been given hope, bring hope in places of despair.

May God help us to always remember that we are never cut off from the Source of every blessing.

The Bread of Life, the True Vine is with us always.

And so we always share in Hope’s Banquet.

Thanks be to the One who hosts the banquet! Amen.

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Advent

Traditions

The Advent season is a time to observe treasured traditions. Here is something you can share with your congregation...

- Have prayer at dinnertime for the families whose cards arrived that day.
- Let each child have their own Advent calendar. Some print a Bible verse along with a picture for each day.

- Observe the 4 Sundays of Advent by making your own family Advent Wreath and light it at Sunday dinner. Look on-line for wreath-lighting readings.
- Bring some Christmas cookies to shut-ins.
- Invite those who may be alone during the holiday to your home for Christmas dinner.
- Construct a Christmas bank and collect money for a missionary, or send a personal gift package to a missionary family... or for a homeless shelter.
- Learn about the Christmas customs and songs of other countries/cultures.
- Tell your children about your past Christmases. Show old family photos.
- Set up a card table with a jigsaw puzzle. Your guests can help you work on it.
- Keep a journal to keep a record of what happened each holiday season, which will be treasured by future generations.
- Go caroling in your neighborhood or at a nursing home.
- Attend a Christmas concert—nothing beats live music in a festive setting.

Questions to ask at a Christmas Gathering:

- What was your best Christmas ever, and why?
- What's the most meaningful gift you ever received, and given?
- What was your favorite Christmas tradition as a child... and now?
- Why do you think people started celebrating the birth of Jesus?
- How have you managed to keep your focus on Christ, to make the season spiritually significant?
- What have you done to avoid being overwhelmed by your holiday "to do" list?

Advent Wreath Liturgy

Many churches have families light the Advent Wreath as a Call to Worship. It is helpful to keep a record of who has participated to ensure most will have a chance. To keep things fresh, I've written several wreath lighting liturgies, and here is one you might find useful...

(Participants can adjust who recites the parts listed below)

1st Sunday in Advent... the lighting of the Advent Wreath

Father: The world was in darkness before the coming of Jesus. We light one candle this morning to remind us to get ready for something special, something unique.

Mother: Our Lord Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness." The love of God is made complete in Christ.

Child: The evergreen of the wreath represents the new life that is found in Christ. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have a new and full life."

Father: As we light the first candle of our Advent Wreath, it will be a light shining in our hearts, calling us to faith, guiding us to the Christ Child, Who came to save us from our sins. We are freed from the captivity of the past.

Mother: The prophet Isaiah declared, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined."

Child: We celebrate the coming of Jesus! He has brought us the light of His truth and love!

The lighting of the first candle

The Entire Family: Come, Lord Jesus—into our hearts, into our home, into our church, and into our world—Amen!

2nd Sunday in Advent... the lighting of the Advent Wreath

Father: We have reason to rejoice, knowing that our Light has come—the Light of the world is Jesus! His Name is Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Child: Years ago people waited for the Messiah, the Anointed One to come, but He is here now with us, in this place of worship, and in our hearts!

Mother: God has opened our eyes so that we might recognize and receive Jesus as our Teacher, our Sacrifice for sin, our Savior and our Lord. We celebrate the birth of a gentle Lamb who was also the fiercest Lion.

Child: We want to reflect the light of Jesus' love this Christmas season of light and joy. Whoever follows Him will have the light of life.

Father: Beyond the manger in Bethlehem there is a Cross. At Christmas we are reminded of the wonder of His birth and our redemption. We are saved by faith and set apart for service for Jesus.

Child: He came to a family, and He has come to our family.

Lighting of 2 of the Advent candles

Family, together: The grace of our Savior, the Lord Jesus, be with us all—now and evermore, Amen!

The 3rd Sunday in Advent... the lighting of the Advent Wreath

Father: Jesus our Lord left the perfection of His eternal glory in Heaven in order to enlighten us and bring us everlasting life through His coming—through His life, His sacrificial death, and resurrection.

Mother: The Rich became poor, for our sakes, so that we, through His poverty, might be made rich. He came to be born in the human heart, a place colder than any stable.

Child: The King became a servant, and He willingly suffered and died so that we might live forever.

Mother: Christmas is a time of love and lights and happy times. But most of all it is a time when we express our worship of Christ, Who came to earth to give His life for us. He is the greatest Present of all.

Father: As the shepherds found Jesus in a manger, may we find Jesus in the joy that we share together. Let us share His light and love with others.

Child: The 3 candles we light show that Jesus is our Light and our Lord.

The lighting of 3 of the candles

Family together: We rejoice, knowing our Light has come. Peace on earth, good will toward men. Let us sing Alleluia to the true Prince of peace!

The 4th Sunday in Advent... the lighting of the Advent Wreath

Father: We declare at the birth of our Messiah that He is our God—we have waited for Him, and we now rejoice in His salvation. He has brought us faith, freedom, forgiveness, and abundant life!

Child: Jesus came to a world filled with fear and sadness. His coming brings hope to all who trust Him. The Name of the Promise is Jesus. He is God speaking to us.

Mother: This morning, all four Advent candles are lit. Now, with all the angelic hosts of heaven, let us proclaim His coming, and let us follow Him, for He is our Light and Lord.

Child: The love of God has been made complete in Jesus our Savior.

Father: The brightness of Jesus has warmed our hearts and homes. His coming to earth touches us individually, personally—when He enters our lives He transforms us, giving us a new direction and destiny.

Child: “What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would give Him a lamb;

If I were a wise man, I would do my part;

Yet what can I give Him?

I can give Him my heart.”

The lighting of the 4 candles

Family together: “O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us to us, we pray; cast out our sin and enter in—be born in us today!”

Lighting of the Advent Wreath... Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Father: In a lowly stable bed our Messiah came. Shepherds on the hillside saw the star and followed it to the Christ Child. At the manger in Bethlehem they found the Light of the World.

Child: Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He came to our dark world, and lived among us. He is still with us; He lives in our hearts.

Mother: As candles bring light to a dark room, so Jesus brings us light as we make decisions, as we try to understand the challenges of life, even as we struggle with unanswered questions and doubts.

Child: Jesus came to show us how to live, to bring our lives meaning, and to offer His life on the Cross, to wash away our sins. We’re excited about the presents we’re going to get, but Jesus has given us the greatest gift of all!

Father: Christmas began in the heart of God. It is complete when it reaches the human heart. As we light the 4 candles of the Advent wreath, along with the Christ Candle in the center, we dedicate our family to serve Christ as His disciples, sharing His light with others.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath, all 5 candles

Family together: This silent, holy night, when all is calm, all is bright—we offer to Jesus all that we are, all that we hope to be. Noel! Born is the King of Israel!

Lighting of the Advent Wreath... Christmas Day Service

Father: Above all the noise and frivolity, joy comes with Christmas. Joy comes not only from opening presents, but from receiving the most wondrous Gift of all—the gift of eternal life through Christ our Messiah.

Mother: We rejoice because God has revealed Himself in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ... the divine presence translated into flesh.

Child: Jesus left His home in heaven to become like one of us. He showed the world His love, His truth, His glory.

Father: The love of God is made complete in Christ. He calls us out of the captivity of our past into His light and freedom.

Mother: As we now light all the Advent candles, we celebrate the completed work of Christ.

Lighting of the candles

Family together: This Christmas Day, may the grace of our Savior be seen in our church and home. Glory to God in the highest!

Blessing of the Christmas Tree

This liturgy can be used in worship or given to families to do at home...

Reading:

Our Lord Jesus Christ died upon the tree of the Cross.
He overcame the sin caused by our first parents,
Who ate of the forbidden tree of Paradise in the garden.
We trust in the sacrifice of Jesus, Whose manger points to Calvary.
If there is no cross in the manger, there is no Christmas.

Prayer:

Lord Our God,
We praise You for the light of Creation:
the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night.
We praise You for the Light of Israel:
the Law, and the prophets,
and the wisdom of the Scriptures.
We praise You for Jesus Christ, Your Son:
He is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace,
Who fills us with the wonder of Your love.

Lord God, let Your blessing come upon us
as we light this tree.
May the light and cheer it gives
be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts.
May all who delight in this tree
come to the knowledge and joy of salvation.

Sing together:

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree, a lesson you can teach us.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree, a lesson you can teach us.
That hope and love and faithfulness, are precious things we can possess.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree, a lesson you can teach us.

Scripture reading – John chapter one (excerpts):

“In the very beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. He created everything there is. In him was life, and this life He gives to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not extinguish it... The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him when He came. Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted. But to all who did believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God... The Word became flesh and lived here on earth among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Prayer:

God of glory, let our hearts' door be ever open, ready to welcome the newborn King.
Let us offer the best we have, to Him who gives us everything... Amen!

Sunday School Pageant, *Christmas Around the World*

Having lived in many places I was inspired to write a Christmas pageant to show the varied ways Christmas is celebrated.

- *Suggestions...* In addition to the Christmas decorations, display miniature flags from various countries and a world globe or large world map, and have decorations from various countries displayed. The children could dress in various native attire.

Members of the congregation might have some input from their varied ethnic backgrounds to add to this celebration. At the fellowship time there could be Christmas treats from various countries, labeled so people can better appreciate how the holiday is celebrated in foreign lands.

Child: “For God loved the **world** so much that He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Processional: “He’s got the whole world in His hands, He’s got the whole world in His hands; He’s got the whole world in His hands, He’s got the whole world in His hands!” (or hymn “God so loved the world”)

- **Germany...**

Child holding a miniature Christmas tree: Christmas trees come from Germany, thanks to the Reformer, Martin Luther. He brought a fir tree into his home on a cold, wintry night so his family could enjoy the beauty of the evergreen while inside and warm. The evergreen is a symbol of everlasting life.

Child holding a stuffed/toy mouse: In Bavaria, southern Germany, the week before Christmas, a tiny mouse chewed up part of the pipe organ, and the Pastor, Joseph Mohr, wondered what to do. He decided to write a Christmas song for children’s choir and guitar. It’s called “Stille Nacht”, but we know it as “Silent Night”. *The children sing the first verse...*

Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

In German: Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht, Alles schläft, einsam wacht. Nur das traute
hoch heilige Paar. Holder Knabe im lокkigen Haar, Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh,
schläft in himmlischer Ruh.

Child, or children together: In Germany, people wish one another “Froliche
Weinnachten!”

• **Italy...**

Child holding a wrapped Christmas present: The country of Italy began the tradition of
giving Christmas presents. I’m glad they started that! The best Christmas gift of all is
the gift of eternal life through Christ our Lord.

Child holding a miniature shepherd: St Francis of Assisi, a small town in Italy, began
another tradition, the Nativity scene.

Child holding a tiny toy cannon: In Rome, cannons are fired to announce Christmas
Eve!

Gesu Bambino~

When blossoms flowered 'mid the snows, Upon a winter night
Was born the Child, the Christmas Rose, The King of Love and Light.
The angels sang, the shepherds sang, The grateful earth rejoiced,
And at his blessed birth the stars, Their exultation voiced.
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Children, together: In Italy, people wish one another “Buon Natale!”

• **Greece...**

Child holding a tiny ship and/or a Santa figure: In Greece, Saint Nickolas is the patron saint of sailors. He works hard to rescue ships from the angry sea. Greek ships never leave port without a picture of Saint Nickolas on board.

I saw three ships come sailing in, on Christmas Day, on Christmas Day,
I saw three ships come sailing in, on Christmas Day in the morning.
And all the angels in heaven shall sing, on Christmas Day, on Christmas Day,
And all the angels in heaven shall sing, on Christmas Day in the morning!

Children, together: In Greece, people wish one another, “Kala Christouyenna!”

• **Russia...**

Child holding a nutcracker: In Russia, families have a special blessing of their homes during Christmas. Even though it is very cold, children enjoy caroling from house to house. Speaking of music, is where the festive ballet *The Nutcracker* comes from! Every December we get to enjoy the “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies.”

(pianist plays a brief portion of the song... some of the children could do a dance to this as well)

Child: In Russia, people greet one another saying, “Pozdrevlyayu s prazdnikom Rozhdestva is Novim Godom”

• **Czechoslovakia...**

Child holding a bell: Czech families at Christmas cut a branch from a cherry tree putting it in water indoors to bloom and ring bells to announce the Savior’s birth.

Child holding a crown: At Christmas we sing about “Good King Wenscelas”, but who was he? He was a kind man who helped poor people at Christmas-time.

Good King Wenceslas looked out on the feast of Stephen,

When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even;
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight gathering winter fuel.

Child: In the Czech Republic, people greet one another at Christmas saying, “Prejeme Vam Vesele Vanoce a stastny Novy Rok”

• Iran and Iraq...

Child holding a figurine of a Wise Man: Modern-day Iran and Iraq used to be the country called Persia, where the Wise Men came from! There aren't many Christians living there today, but we have lots of soldiers serving in Iraq and they spend Christmas on-duty, but they find time to celebrate. Their chaplains lead Christmas worship services. Let's remember to pray for them and for their families back home.

We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.
Oh, star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright;
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

Children, together: The Arabic Christmas greeting is “Milad Majid”

• Mexico...

Child holding a poinsettia: Poinsettias come from Mexico and there is a legend about a small poor boy named Pablo who was walking to church at Christmas, who was very sad because he had nothing to offer the Christ Child. He saw some green branches and gathered them. Other children laughed, but when he placed them in front of the manger scene, a beautiful red star-shaped flower appeared on each branch.

In Mexico, people wish one another (sing):

Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Prospero Ano y Felicidad.

Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Prospero Ano y Felicidad.

I want to wish you a Merry Christmas, I wanna wish you a Merry Christmas;

I want to wish you a Merry Christmas, From the bottom of my heart!

Poetry Reading... by one of the teenagers:

The whole world waits in December darkness for a glimpse of the Light of God.

Even those who snarl “Humbug!” and chase away the carolers have been looking to the skies.

The one who declared he never would forgive has forgiven,

And those who left home have returned.

Even wars are halted, if briefly, as the whole world looks star-ward in the December darkness.

We look from our windows watching for an angel with luminous wings to announce the Hope of the World.

(Ann Weems, *Kneeling in Bethlehem*)

• **Israel...**

Child holding a manger or a star: Today in Bethlehem, Christmas is the most special time of the year. At the Church of the Nativity, thousands of people gather in Manger Square. They have a parade, and people gather to see the spot where Jesus was born, which is marked by a silver star. A minister from Boston (Phillips Brooks of Trinity Church) wrote a carol about this special place:

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie,

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;

Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Child: The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom. Let's remember to pray for the peace of Israel.

Scripture Reading (read by a teenager): A prediction of the coming Messiah, from the Old Testament prophet Micah...

You, Bethlehem, David's country, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a shepherd-ruler of Israel will come from you, One whose origins are from the distant past. Meanwhile, Israel will be in foster homes until the birth pangs are over and the Child is born, and the scattered brothers come back home to the family of Israel. He will stand tall and lead His flock by God's strength, centered in the majesty of God-Revealed. And the people will have a good and safe home, for the whole world will know is true greatness – Peacemaker of the world! (5:2-4)

• **Sweden...**

Child holding either a doll of St Lucia or a small advent wreath: In Sweden people honor Saint Lucia. During a time when Christians were punished for believing in Jesus, Lucia brought food to Christians who were hiding in dark underground tunnels. To light the way, she wore a lingonberry wreath of candles on her head. Young girls in Swedish families continue this as a Christmas tradition. They dress as Lucia and serve special Christmas pastries. Lucia brought hope during a dark time.

Natten går stor och stum, nu hörs dess vingar
i alla tysta rum, sus som av vingar.
Se, på vår tröskel star, vitklädd med ljus i hår
Sankta Lucia, Sankta Lucia.

The night goes great and mute, now hear it swings
in every silent room, murmurs as if from wings.
Look at our threshold stands, white-clad with lights in her hair
Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia.

(or perform this as an instrumental piece)

Children, together: In Sweden, people wish one another, “God Jul!”

• **France...**

Child holding a shoe: In France, children leave their shoes by the fireplace on Christmas Eve for a small present from Père Noël, then they go to church with their family and return home for a special late night supper. In France, Christmas puppet shows are very popular. And most gifts are given on December 6th, Saint Nicholas Day.

Il est né, le divin Enfant, Jouez, hautbois, résonnez, musettes;

Il est né, le divin Enfant; Chantons tous son avènement!

He is born, Holy Child divine, Loud let us sing to greet His coming;

He is born, holy child adored, Sound the pipes, let the trumpets play!

Children, together: In France, people wish one another, “Joyeux Noël”

• **Australia...**

Child wearing a beach shirt, sunglasses and sandals: In Australia, south of the equator, or “Down Under”, December comes in the middle of summer. They celebrate Christmas, but they have no snow! Many families eat their Christmas dinner at the beach; there’s no Frosty the Snowman in Australia! But we don’t need snow to have Christmas. In Australia Christmas stockings are hung, but very few homes have fireplaces. Santa arrives on a surfboard, or on a sleigh drawn by eight kangaroos!

Close the program with the teens singing “*Some Children See Him*”:

Some children see Him lily white, the baby Jesus born this night.

Some children see Him lily white, with tresses soft and fair.

Some children see Him bronzed and brown, the Lord of Heaven to earth come down.

Some children see Him bronzed and brown, with dark and heavy hair.

Some children see Him almond-eyed, this Savior whom we kneel beside.
Some children see Him almond-eyed, with skin of yellow hue.
Some children see Him dark as they, sweet Mary's Son to whom we pray.
Some children see him dark as they, and, ah! they love Him, too!

The children in each different place, will see the baby Jesus' face
Like theirs, but bright with heavenly grace, and filled with holy light.
O lay aside each earthly thing, and with thy heart as offering,
Come worship now the infant King; 'Tis love that's born tonight!

Everyone shout together: “Joy to the **whole** world – the Lord is born!”

Blue Christmas... when Christmas isn't “merry”

Christmas is a sad time for some. They have “the blues.” It is also a stressful time, as most of us are over-obligated and over-extended, and we may have unrealistic expectations for the holiday. Were hoping it will be happier than previous ones, but we're not overly optimistic. Even some of the songs are negative: “I'll have a blue Christmas without you,” “Next year all our troubles will be out of sight.” Amid the forced joyfulness there are grieving people in pain, dealing with significant losses—the death of a loved one, a divorce, the loss of a job, or physical disability. Churches often respond with a service on December 21st, the longest, darkest night of the year, to bring healing to troubled souls. This is the traditional feast day of St. Thomas, who struggled to believe the good news of Christ's resurrection and was given joy beyond hope. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9).

The theme is comfort and hope for inner healing. Some call it a service of light. The congregation is invited to come forward and light a candle in memory of someone or to mark an event in their lives. Anointing of oil for inner healing may be offered.

The challenge of such a service is to acknowledge the gloom yet not reinforce it. Those leading such services need to focus on hope and trust, not despair. Scripture readings, poetry, songs, and prayers are chosen to bring peace.

You may wish to include in a Blue Christmas this *affirmation*:

I BELIEVE that Christmas is more than a time for parties and ornaments; it is a time for remembering Christ and the incarnation of God's love in human flesh.

I BELIEVE there are gifts more important than the ones under the Christmas tree, the things we teach our children, the way we share ourselves with friends, and the industry with which we set about reshaping the world in our time.

I BELIEVE that the finest carols are often sung by the poorest voices; from hearts made warm by the wonder and promise of the season.

I BELIEVE in the angel's message that we should not be afraid—that the Child of Bethlehem is able to overcome all anxieties, struggles and insecurities.

I BELIEVE in prayer and quietness as a way of appropriating Christmas—that if I wait in silence I will experience the Presence of the One born in the manger, for He lives today as surely as He lived then.

I BELIEVE in going away from Christmas as the wise men went: “another way.” I want to be different when these days are past—more centered, more thoughtful, more caring.

AND I BELIEVE God will help me. Amen.

“O Jesus, when I think of Thee—Thy manger, cross and throne—my spirit trusts exultingly, in Thee and Thee alone.”

Christmas Communion

We welcome all who trust in the Person and Work of Christ for salvation to join our Communion ordinance. To prepare to approach the Table of our Lord, we now convey our faith and priorities with the confession found in our bulletin...

Confession:

If there is no cross in the manger, there is no Christmas. If there is no commitment in us, there are no Wise Men searching. If we offer no cup of cold water, there is no gold, no frankincense, no myrrh. If there is no praising God's name, there are no angels singing. If there is no spirit of Alleluia, there are no shepherds watching. If there is no room in our inn, then "*Merry Christmas*" mocks the Christ Child, and the Holy Family is just a holiday card. If there is no forgiveness in us, there is no cause for celebration. If Christmas is not now, if Christ is not born into the everyday present, then what is all the noise about? Let's make Christ central in our celebration.

The Bread:

Christ's death we proclaim; His victory over sin we declare. His first coming we celebrate; His second advent we await. Holy is His Name. We receive the bread and the life broken for us.

(Deacons distribute the bread)

We who are many are one body, for we all share in the same bread. Let us recall the brokenness of our Savior as we eat.

The Cup:

Bethlehem leads to nearby Jerusalem, and the manger leads to a cross. Jesus was born to ransom our souls, to redeem us from the captivity of sin. We honor His coming and recall His sacrifice.

(Deacons distribute the cup)

The Just came and died for the unjust. This is why the Baby was born in Bethlehem. O Come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Lessons and Carols

This is an Advent service rich in tradition and growing in popularity. Here is a format you may wish to adapt...

Prelude & Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Welcome and Call to Worship...

God is with us... He is coming into our lives in a new way. The birth of the Christ-child is the renewal of hope; a reminder that Christ will come again. Keep watch for the light; it is drawing near.

Scripture reading: Isaiah 40 (*excerpts*), “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it... say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’... He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those with young. He will keep them safe from harm.”

Carol: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

Invocation & Lord’s Prayer...

Lord Jesus, we ask that You be present among us, and open the eyes of our hearts to Your presence. You came into the world in Bethlehem, and we anticipate the fullness of Your Kingdom. Show us the power of Your love as we reflect on Your coming to bring light to a darkened world. You took the hard road that led to a cross; there wasn’t much joy in Your world. We gather to worship the Babe of Bethlehem and the Messiah wounded for our transgressions. Let Heaven and nature sing! We now pray together the model prayer You taught us, saying, (*Lord’s Prayer*)

Carol: “*Away in a Manger*”

Reading: “*I saw a stable*” (Mary Elizabeth Coleridge)

I saw a stable, low and very bare,

A little child in the manger.
The oxen knew Him, and had Him in their care,
To men He was a stranger.
The safety of the world was lying there.
And the world's danger.

Solo or Choral selection

Reading, "*Christmas*"...

It's sharing your gifts, not purchasing gifts;
It's not wrapping presents, its being present
and wrapping your arms around the ones you love;
It's not getting Christmas cards out on time,
It's sending any card, anytime, at the right time;
It's not having the biggest and best Christmas light display,
It's displaying the Christ light that comes from your heart;
It's not Santa coming down the chimney,
It's Jesus coming down from Heaven,
and giving us the gift of eternal life. - Anonymous

Carol: "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

Reading: "*Emmanuel, God with us*"

Not far off, out of touch, out of reach,
Not a shadow, not a legend, not a myth.
Jesus close at hand, with us, in the flesh;
Tangible, touchable, seeable, knowable.
Love breathing, love giving, love caring,
Love healing, love teaching, love dying;
Love feeling our grief, bearing our sorrows.
Emmanuel, God with us...

In the manger, in the temple, on the road,
By the well, in the boat, upon the hillside,
Along the fields, in homes, at the table.
Feeding the hungry, comforting mourners,
Speaking to multitudes, raising the dead.
And seeking out individuals with open arms,
With words that beckon, and a voice that calls:
“Come unto Me.”

Carol: “What Child is This”

Scripture reading: Matthew 2:1-11

Guided Prayer...

- Let us pray for peace on earth, good will toward men...
- Let us pray for those who are away from home this holiday...
- Let us pray for those struggling with memories of loss...
- Let us pray for those stressed out this season...
- Let us pray for those who don't get the meaning of Christmas...
- Let us pray for the needs of our families and friends...

Jesus, God-with-us, we pray, realizing that You understand our needs; You came here and endured the difficulties and temptations we face. We entrust our concerns to Your care... Amen.

Scripture reading: John 1:1-5, 14

Carol: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”

Benediction: “The Work of Christmas” (Ann Weems)...

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins...
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

Postlude

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Lent and Easter

Not all Protestants observe Lent, and there's no Scriptural command to do so, yet I've found that Lent helps prepare us for Easter. Calling Christians to reflect on the atoning sacrifice of Christ will result in an increased appreciation for the cost of our salvation. Henri Nouwen notes, "Lent is a time of refocusing, of reentering the place of truth, of reclaiming our true identity."

Ash Wednesday

The season of Lent begins with a call to repentance. The following is an Ash Wednesday observance...

Prelude: *"O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"*

Call to Worship:

Leader: On Ash Wednesday we begin our Lenten journey;

People: We come to receive a symbol as a mark of our faith.

Leader: There is a remnant of "*Hosanna!*" lingering in the ashes.

People: Lent is a time to let the power of faith take hold of us.

Leader: Lent is a season of reflection and redirection;

People: A period of remorse, mourning, and repentance;

Leader: An occasion to ponder our mortality and God's promises.

People: A time to wander the streets of Jerusalem, and to kneel before the Cross.

Hymn: *"Come Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy"*

Prayer of Confession:

Lord, cover us in the ashes of repentance, free us from the bounds of our failures.

Help us begin anew. Cover us in the ashes of surrender. We give ourselves to You.

When we are overwhelmed, when our hurt is too painful, when our loneliness robs our joy, help us find You amid the chaos. Cover us with the assurance of pardon, purchased by the passion of Christ, in Whose Name we pray, Amen.

Hymn: *"May the Mind of Christ My Savior"*

Scripture reading: Psalm 51

Guided Prayer (We will silently pray for specific concerns)

Let's confess our sins to God and ask for His strength...

Intercede for peace in our troubled world...

Pray for your neighborhood, and how you can be a better neighbor...

Talk to God about your relationships... how they are, how they ought to be.

Speak to God, asking Him to guide your Lenten journey...

Ask for the anointing power of the Holy Spirit in your life...

Pray that you will patiently wait upon the Lord...

Perhaps there's *one more thing* you'd like to say to God...

Let us now talk to God together with the words of the Lord's Prayer...

Message

Blessing and Imposition of Ashes: “Lord, bless the sinner who asks for Your pardon and bless all those who receive these ashes. They show that we are but dust...but You can do new things with dust. May we keep this somber Lenten season in preparation for the joy of Easter. This we ask, through Christ our Lord, Amen.”
“God meets your sin with forgiving grace; God meets your mortality with eternal life.”

(Save leftover palms from the previous Palm Sunday and burn them, adding a bit of olive oil, or you can purchase ashes in some religious supply stores)

Poem

Lent is time to take the time to let the power of our faith story take hold of us,
A time to let the events get up and walk around in us.
A time to intensify our living unto Christ,
A time to hover over the thoughts of our hearts.
A time to place our feet in the streets of Jerusalem,
Or to walk along the sea and listen to His word.
A time to touch His robe and feel the healing surge through us;
A time to ponder and a time to wonder...
Lent is a time to allow a fresh new taste of God! (Ann Weems)

Hymn: “*Cleanse Me O God*” (Maori)

Closing prayer (together):

Forty days stretch before us,
Forty days of seeking to understand Your person and work.
We yearn to feel Your presence and be Your people.
Yet we move about a profane world that mars what is holy.
Where, O God, can we find You in the unholy mess?
How can we find the holy in the ordinary?
We hope to place our feet in the streets of Jerusalem,

And feel Your healing surge through us. Amen.

Postlude: “*What Wondrous Love is This, O My Soul?*”

Lenten Activities... don’t just give up something, DO something!

- Display a picture of the death of Christ in your home or office space.
- Make a list of ten people you’ll pray for daily during Lent.
- Memorize Bible verses about Jesus’ sacrifice, recite them when saying family grace.
- Make a table-top Easter Egg tree (the egg is a symbol of new life) with Christian symbols.
- Display a palm cross in your home or on your front door, and/or a banner proclaiming the victory of Christ.
- Observe a family Passover Seder or Maundy Thursday foot-washing in your home; include singing.
- Construct a crown of thorns for display and contemplation.
- Pin sequins on a thick candle; on one side, a cross, on the other, spell out JOY.
- Make (or buy) hot cross buns
- Play a recording of *Handel’s Messiah* or attend a sacred music concert.
- Read a devotional book; give one to a friend.
- Participate in a small group Bible study; carry your Bible with you.
- Give up something pleasurable during Lent to show repentance for your sins. This is not to gain favor with God but to show we’re under His Lordship and we identify with our Savior’s sufferings.
- Wear religious jewelry as an expression of your faith.
- Visit an art gallery, taking special note of its sacred art.
- Set aside a day for prayer and fasting.
- Look for ways to share your faith in Christ.

Palm Sunday

Holy Week begins by reflecting on our Lord's triumph and tears, which is why some call this Passion Sunday. Some churches begin their worship outdoors and process into the sanctuary, waving palms. Some have dramatic readings, acting out the triumphant entry. Banners are hung. Special music is performed. Creative displays are set up. And the focus is centered on the Person and Work of Christ.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy, or Holy Thursday, is an occasion to focus exclusively on the Upper Room. For churches whose weekly emphasis is not the Eucharist, this is an occasion to have an extended Communion service. Just as Easter is a celebration, Maundy Thursday is a somber occasion.

Tenebrae Service... Tenebrae is a Passion service from the 8th Century; representing the darkness that overcame the world as the Jesus, the Light of the world was crucified. The word *Tenebrae* is Latin for "darkness" or "shadows" It is a solemn, contemplative, unfinished service for Holy Week. After each reading and response, a candle will be extinguished, till only one, a symbol of our Lord, remains. By its light all depart in silence. Here is a sample format for a Maundy Thursday Tenebrae service...

Call to Remembrance

Pastor: In remembrance, we gather...

People: To be with the One who lived faithfully and who teaches us the meaning of faithfulness.

Pastor: In remembrance, we worship...

People: Lifting our voices to the One who calls us to sacrificially love one another, as He loves.

Pastor: In remembrance, we feast...

People: Breaking the Bread which makes us whole, drinking the Cup which fills us with grace. We come to worship and recall.

Hymn

Prayer of Confession (*together*):

Wounded Healer, we say, as did Simon Peter in the Upper Room, “Cleanse not my feet only, but all of me.” We have come here defiled, muddied by the world that surrounds us, dirty from the roads we’ve traveled, polluted by the impulses we’ve yielded to, and wearied by our struggle against sin. Lord Jesus, Pour over us the water of Your Spirit, cleanse us by Your grace, and apply to us the everlasting benefits of Your sacrifice, as we partake in the Bread and Cup... and remember.

The Apostles’ Creed

Holy Communion

(This is an opportunity to serve the Lord’s Supper in a different manner, perhaps by Intinction, or with homemade bread, or matzo)

Invitation to Communion: We have come again to this familiar Table; we came before, but now it seems so dark and somber, and final. The Table is fixed in time and in our thoughts we ponder the love that led to this Holy Thursday event. This Body broken, this Blood shed, this Life given--for us.

(A table is set with 7 lit candles and a candle snuffer. In the following liturgy, after each of the readings and responses, the reader extinguishes one of the candles on the table. Between the readings there can be music: instrumentals, solos, or choral selections reflecting the Passion of Christ)

#1 Matthew 26:31-35... *the prediction of denial*

Leader: “Surely not I, Lord, surely not I; I’ll never desert You.”

People: How quickly we express our allegiance to Jesus. How quickly we also falter, deserting the very One we love.

#2 Matthew 26:36-41... *the agony of Gethsemane*

Leader: “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

People: We want to be Jesus’ faithful followers; our intentions are good, but it’s easier to sit back and rest than to be busy serving Jesus.

#3 Matthew 26:46-50, *the betrayal & arrest of Jesus*

Leader: “Greetings, Rabbi.” Words are cheap, and kisses can be deceiving. Jesus received from a false friend the kiss of betrayal.

People: How often we mask our real thoughts with flattering words and dishonest admiration? We say one thing and mean another.

#4 Matthew 26:69-75... *the denial*

Leader: “I don’t know the man.” It’s an honor to be associated with one who is popular, but not one who is controversial or condemned.

People: We want to be Jesus’ friends when people love Him, but will we stand by His side when people curse and ridicule Him?

#5 Matthew 27:27-31... *the soldiers scourge Jesus*

Leader: The soldiers mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

People: When we profess to be His followers but ignore His teachings, are we not mocking Him as well?

#6 Matthew 27:32-37... *the Crucifixion*

Leader: “He saved others, but he cannot save himself.” With these cruel words they scoffed and ridiculed the very Son of God.

People: Jesus *could* have saved Himself, but He chose to suffer and die for me. By surrendering His life, He saved mine.

#7 Matthew 27:45-46... *the death of death*

Leader: God, forsaken by God! Nails did not keep our Savior there at Calvary...

People: Love held Jesus to the cross, and for three days the world became a darker place.

Parting Confession:

Leader: We're the crowd...

People: Easily swayed, easily scared.

Leader: We're the struggling disciples

People: We're amazed that Jesus wants us to love the outcast.

Leader: We hate injustice when it's injustice towards us;

People: We love mercy when it's mercy for us.

Leader: Yet we think we have to earn eternal life.

People: Grace seems too amazing for us.

Leader: We forget that God has nothing for the self-made.

People: We can never deserve His love; we need His pardon.

Leader: We want to pay our own way, to take care of our guilt.

People: But Maundy Thursday says it's already been paid. We depart quietly, contemplating a love so amazing, so divine.

Good Friday

In many communities Good Friday is an ecumenical event. In one town where I served, the clergy association organized an annual praise walk through a wooded park. At places along the walk churches would have brief presentations, using drama, interpretive dance, readings, Scripture, and songs. At the end an offering was taken for an area ministry (food pantry, shelter for abused women, rescue mission).

If your church chooses to hold their own service, here is a format you might adapt:

Good Friday Observance

Welcome: The Friday before Easter/Resurrection Sunday, is celebrated as the anniversary of Christ's crucifixion. Since the time of the early church, it has been a

day dedicated to fasting and prayer. It was a day good for us... not good for our Savior, who suffered for us, the Just for the unjust.

Call to Worship: “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Invocation & Lord’s Prayer

Hymn: “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*”

Scripture Reading: Mark 15:1-38

Hymn: “*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*”

Guided Prayer... a time when we all pray together, but silently about specific requests. You’ll be given some things to pray about and time to offer your prayers to the Lord.

- Ask God to help you understand the pain and sorrow Jesus, our Sin-bearer, faced on the cross...
- Ask God to help you face your own darkness and despair...
- Pray for healing of the times you’ve felt rejected, defeated, alienated—and God seemed far away...
- Request God to show you someone who needs a word of comfort, who needs acceptance and encouragement...
- Calvary became a battleground, marked with blood and agony; pray for those engaged in spiritual warfare...
- Ask God to give you faith, when He chooses not to give you answers...
- Jesus drank a cup of woe so that we might drink the cup of joy; He was forsaken so that we might be forgiven. Let’s close this time of personal prayer by giving thanks for so great a salvation...

Hymn: *“There is a Redeemer”*

Poetry Reading, *“If Christ Had Lept”*

“If Christ had lept from the cross, had recalled the blood that striped His face;
The blood that colored the head of each Prove-Thyself driven nail;
If He had uprooted that tree from Golgotha then had hurled it at men...
They might have believed He was as He said, God’s Son
-And He would not have been.

Sermon

Hymn: *“What Wondrous Love is This”*

Closing affirmation: Here is my duty--to be as Christ in the world; to do what He would do, to live as He would live, to walk in love and meekness. Then would He be known, and I would find serenity. Loving Savior, help me to convey Your wondrous love in every conversation, in every action. Amen.

Easter Sunrise Service

As with Good Friday, this is often a town-wide observance at a scenic location, often followed by a breakfast hosted by one of the churches. At one town where I served, our tradition was to have the newest pastor or priest give the sermon. Here is a sample service you may wish to adapt:

Welcome & Call to Worship

Leader: As we approached Jerusalem, the crowd stood at the gate and cried in tear-choked voice: “We are lost in His death.”

People: Upon the hill the angels sang: “We are found in His rising.”

Invocation and the Lord’s Prayer

Song

Confession of Faith (together)...

The Temple curtain is torn in two; the cross and the tomb are empty. The cup of wrath has been drained. The victory has been won. The serpent has been crushed. The throne occupied. The death of death is accomplished. This morning we celebrate the triumph of light over dark, truth over lie, life over death. Because the tomb was not the end of Christ, it will not be the end of us. Christ is risen indeed!

Song

Scripture reading

Sermon

Song

Benediction:

Leader: Death abides not on a hill called Golgotha, but in every heart that makes room.

People: Life abides not outside a garden tomb in Jerusalem, but in every heart that makes room. He is risen--in history, in us. Alleluia!

Easter/Resurrection Sunday worship

This is the big one. Easter Sunday is when visitors and inactive members are sure to come. It is the occasion when the music, the liturgy, the flowers, and the sermon need to be exceptional. In a way, Easter is an *advertisement*--proclaiming the Good News but also promoting the church to an indifferent public who reluctantly come this one Sunday out of tradition to "give a nod to God." It is a heavy responsibility to plan a meaningful service, and no easy task. Easter is *evangelism*--proclaiming truth to the lost. Easter is *encouragement*--giving hope to believers who need the power of the resurrection in their lives. Most pastors agonize over their Easter sermons. There's a lot of pressure on them. Their Easter proclamation must be perfect. They've already used their best material, so how can they possibly hit another *home*

run? Maybe they need to pause and remind themselves that every Sunday we acknowledge the resurrection. They need to do their best, but leave the results to God.

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Leadership

Francis Schaeffer noted that “None of us are ready until we come to the place where we are really ready for God’s will—regardless of what it is.” Or where it is. When God blessed Abraham, He also gave him marching orders. God’s blessing comes when we’re willing to go wherever He chooses and are willing to serve however He chooses. Christianity is a commitment to God in which we are no longer in charge, but under God’s authority. We’re “under new management.” In leading others, we need God’s leadership.

There are two kinds of people in the world: thermostats and thermometers. Thermostats make things happen. Thermometers only reflect what is happening. Leaders are thermostats.

Teddy Roosevelt was told by an admirer, “Mr. President, you are a great man.” He replied, “No, I’m simply a plain, ordinary man, but highly motivated.”

Leadership is the art of influencing others toward the achievement of predetermined goals. Effective leadership comes from *the right use of power...*

Legitimate power is granted by position in an organization. It is formal authority, and is a resource, not a guarantee of effective leadership. **Coercive power** comes from force through threat, and those who follow do so out of fear, not respect.

Expertise enhances the perception of leaders, and is based on demonstrated technical competence. Skilled leaders know what they’re talking about. They have wisdom that others need.

Traits of effective leaders:

- Serve as coaches, advice-givers, and cheerleaders
- Thinks of ways to make people focused on their mission
- Open and available to all, welcoming interruptions as providential
- Decisive and persistent
- Tolerant of disagreement
- Knows people's names
- Delegate even when they know they can do a better job themselves
- Gives credit and praise to others
- Offer honest, frequent feedback
- Honest under pressure
- Prefers in-person communication
- Admits their mistakes; comforts others when they admit them
- Keeps promises

There are varying **leadership types**. It is useful to recognize and understand differences in leadership approaches so that we can know how best to communicate; to know what others want to know; what makes them tune in and out...so we can *do unto others* as they want it done to them, which makes for effective communication.

The following is a summary of Life Orientations taken from Stuart Atkins, author of *The Name of Your Game*, which offers four leadership styles:

Controller/Taker: They want *action*. They are go-getters, achievers. They want results and are action/mission-oriented. They're not concerned about being liked; they're concerned about the bottom-line. Their philosophy is: If you want things to happen, you've got to make them happen and convince people to trust in your competency.

Supportive/Giver: They're seeking *excellence*. They possess a strong work ethic and high standards. They have to feel they are working on the most relevant issue and need to feel helpful. They are cooperative, responsible, committed, loyal and dedicated to the pursuit of perfection. Their philosophy is: If I work hard, prove my worth and pursue excellence I will be successful.

Conserving/Holder: Concerned with *process*. This style does not like to make quick decisions. Before they act, they will methodically and systematically explore all options and set priorities using reason and careful analysis. Their philosophy is: Preserve what you have and use existing resources to build the future on the past in a careful and rational way.

Adapting/Dealer: Concerned with *harmony*. They want things to run smoothly and are people-oriented. They use a light touch and personal charm to win over people. They are flexible, tactful, humorous, diplomatic, and accommodating. Their philosophy is: If everyone feels good about themselves and if there's harmony within the work force, we'll get the results we seek.

Quotes on LEADERSHIP

One thing all leaders have in common is a high tolerance of uncertainty.

A leader is a dealer in *hope*.

Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity. –General George S. Patton, Jr.

You can't lead what you won't live. –Ed Stetzer

The price of leadership is prayer. -Billy Graham

Leadership is not being in charge; it is about taking care of people in your charge. –Simon Sinek

A leader is not a person who can do the work better than his followers; he is the person who can get his followers to do the work better than he can. -Fred Smith

If you're riding ahead of the herd, take a look back every now and then to make sure it's still there. –Will Rogers

There are 3 kinds of people:

- Those who make things happen;
- Those who watch things happen;
- Those who wonder “*What happened?*”

Leadership is producing motivated followership.

The great illusion of leadership is that a person can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there. –Henri J. Nouwen

If serving is below you, leadership is beyond you.

Let us be servants in order to be leaders. –Dostoevsky

None of us are ready for leadership until we come to the place before the Lord where we are really ready for God's will—regardless of what it is. –Francis Schaeffer

Would YOU work for you?

Leadership is not about being the best. Leadership is about making everyone else better.

My job is to lead the organization, not control it. –Hans Finzel

Being the kind of pastor that satisfies a congregation is one of the easiest jobs on the face of the earth—if we are satisfied with satisfying congregations. –Eugene Peterson

No one is thinking if everyone is thinking alike. –General George Patton

None of us are as smart as all of us.

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Sabbaticals

Eugene Peterson reflected, “How can I lead people into the quiet place beside the still waters if I am in perpetual motion?” (*The Contemplative Pastor*). In order to stay

the course, remain fresh, *and* avoid burn-out, it is vital to yourself and your church to take short-term retreats, attend conferences, and especially take sabbaticals.

Pastors are givers but rarely takers. We are driven by our vocational calling to burn brightly for God, but if we don't watch it, we will burn-out. Chuck Swindoll quoted someone who said, "I'd rather burn-out than rust out," then added, "Either way, you're **out**." Too many of us are running on empty. I've spoken to scores of clergy who in decades of faithful pastoral care have never taken more than a few weeks off for themselves, who regard a sabbatical as an unrealistic luxury, a pipe-dream; which ought not be the case.

Up-front I need to confess some envy I have of some high-profile ministers who take yearly sabbaticals, and one in particular who took a six-month one, while scores of hard-working pastors never get even one month off. "*Must be nice*" I muttered sarcastically under my breath with clenched teeth. I didn't dismiss or deny their need; I only wished I too could get away.

In my own self-importance, I never considered that my congregation could also use a break from me. Pastors are the church's spiritual supply-line and we convince ourselves that we are indispensable and irreplaceable. I now realize my church might have benefited from hearing a fresh, new voice, a different emphasis than what I'd been providing, and a different pastoral style than what I'd been offering. The congregation was probably tired of looking at me. Time away is an opportunity to develop and invigorate lay leaders to engage in ministry. I don't want to be replaced, I do want to be missed and needed, but a change would likely have been good for my church as well as for me. But how can they miss me if I won't go away?

A clergy sabbatical is not a reward, but a necessary, needed time of rest, recreation, refreshment, reassessment of one's vision, retooling, renewal of one's vocational commitment, reconnecting to one's self (and spouse), plus a rekindling of spiritual

passion. Pastors should return from this period reborn with new ideas and a clearer perception of God's vision for the church.

Most clergy I know keep plugging away year-after-year with a couple of vacation weeks per year, usually scheduled around their annual denominational meeting...it's not working. To remain effective, ministers need an extended break from the responsibilities that consume them and work on personal/spiritual renewal. I know a lot of ministers...it's not happening.

Seeing that resources are severely limited, how might a pastor go about taking a sabbatical? First of all, there needs to be a sabbatical policy in one's church constitution allowing for a paid leave at least every seven to ten years, for a two-to-three month period during which an interim minister, lay person, or seminary student covers the preaching and other pastoral duties during this absence. Having a policy also provides a package incentive for when a congregation is seeking a new minister.

Assuming all is well, where does one go? Ideally there should be retreat centers specifically designed for clergy sabbaticals, yet the overwhelming majority only accommodate 3-5 day retreats, which do not in any way satisfy the reasonable needs of an extended break. I think these ministries need to be confronted and approached with the challenge of developing their own sabbatical programs, even if they can only accommodate a few clergy at a time. They are missing out of a critical area of ministry support that is sorely needed.

How hard would it be for a retreat/conference center to allocate a small apartment or cabin and integrate one resident minister into their summer program? There'd be worship and perhaps some educational sessions, recreation, a library, and some one-on-one spiritual guidance. We all have unique skills that could be utilized, while also providing us time for rest and reflection. When I approached various centers with this concept I was told it is "logistically unfeasible." Some seminaries and retreat centers offer "mini-sabbaticals" for one week. They should not use that word.

When I worked at a Christian camp in North Carolina one summer during my college days, a missionary was on staff the entire summer. He was on light duty, speaking in chapel occasionally and available to talk to those on retreat... I now realize he was there on sabbatical. I've tried to get on staff myself at several places, to no avail. Had I the wherewithal I would start my own facility just for clergy sabbaticals.

When I was an Army Chaplain I was sent TDY (temporary duty) for training, often a month at a time, at least once or twice a year. I received an entire year of CPE/Clinical Pastoral Education at Brooke Army Medical Center when I was a Major. Now that I'm a civilian minister I find it harder to renew myself and refresh my vision.

Once churches agree to allow their ministers to take a sabbatical, what exactly do they do and where do they go? Having run out of options, I nonetheless wasn't about to stay home and hang out in my living room for three months. Some clergy use the time to travel, visiting new places. Some go for more education at a seminary far away. This may meet their needs, but my understanding of a sabbatical is that it is primarily a time of rest and reflection, an inner journey. Remaining in one place has some advantages. Ideally one should pick a place where a trusted fellow pastor is available to provide spiritual direction/coaching/mentoring.

Silence and solitude are important ingredients of a sabbatical. Pastors are normally so busy they never slow down, and so much of what we do involves communication. We're working the issues and teaching, preaching, counseling, leading groups, running meetings. We need time to decompress, which can only come from inactivity and quiet-time. We need to be still and refocus.

As for the place, this becomes the biggest challenge since retreat/conference centers do not appear willing to help. One option is to rent a house; another is to coordinate a sabbatical with another pastor far away and trade homes... with the understanding

that you're not there to also trade churches. Let the interim handle that. Be ministered to for a change.

On self-directed sabbaticals, you'll need to bring with you some resources. Include all the books you've been meaning to read, a study Bible, a notebook for journaling, a musical instrument if you play one, a hymnal (even if you aren't musical), a prayer book (like *Valley of Vision*), and any equipment for your favorite sport (I'd definitely bring my kayak).

Besides rest, a sabbatical is an occasion to reconnect with one's spouse and children. They should go too, and be free from their normal duties as well.

Some pastors take on a project of some sort to justify their time away from the parish. They finally write their book or conduct research, review their Biblical languages, attend a conference, build furniture, learn a new skill or make progress in getting their Doctorate. Don't do too much; save some things for the next sabbatical. Projects are fine, but the principle goal of sabbaticals is time to slow down, reflect on and renew one's calling. Doing so many important things in the church, pastors need to take time to reconnect with themselves and God, which involves being, not doing. I heard of a minister who gave a lengthy list of sabbatical objectives to his spiritual director who looked it over and tore it up, saying, "Here's my *list* of what I want you to do." He handed over a blank piece of paper. We mostly need to observe time, not engage in activity.

Those who write about sabbaticals suggest there be some re-entry matters. The bottom-line is not to "hit the ground running" but resume one's pastoral duties in a slow, steady pace. Take a few days to work through your in-box and catch up on all you've missed, and then resume your work. Let your first sermon back be a narrative of your experience, your journey to wellness.

The Gospels record how Jesus went apart from His followers on occasions to commune with the Father. If we don't follow His example and, we'll fall apart. There's no need to feel guilty; this is a warranted rest. Charles Spurgeon (who often took extended breaks) stated: "We must every now and then cry 'halt!' and serve the Lord by holy inactivity and consecrated leisure." A clergy sabbatical can extend the useful life of a pastor. If we take the necessary time, we will return refreshed and ready to serve more effectively, to the glory of God.

It is important that churches establish a policy for clergy sabbaticals. Here is a sample *Sabbatical Policy*:

A clergy sabbatical is a time of spiritual renewal, designed to stimulate fresh vision and nourishment to the pastor's soul, a deeper relationship with the Lord, and a clearer understanding of God's vision for the church.

The pastor is eligible for a 3-month sabbatical every ____ years (Most policies state every 5-7 years). Sabbatical leave is normally for a period of two to three months, which could be extended by one month of vacation leave for a total of four months. Further sabbaticals would be considered by the Board of Deacons on an individual basis and the needs of the pastor.

During the sabbatical the pastor would not return for weddings, funerals, counseling, or administrative duties. It is a time of respite from pastoral ministry. The pastor would not take calls from the congregation during this time apart.

At the completion of the sabbatical, the pastor would report back to the congregation any lessons learned, insights gleaned, and a summary of what was accomplished while away.

During the sabbatical leave the pastor would be paid a full salary and the church would be responsible for paying stipends for pulpit supply during this time. Pastoral care could be accomplished by a seminarian, lay persons, an interim pastor, or by

several fill-in clergy at a rate of \$_____ per week. In addition, an additional \$_____ would be offered toward the pastor's educational expenses during this leave. The Board of Deacons will include in their annual budget a line item to set aside funds toward a sabbatical leave to be kept in a separate account until required.

The pastor will provide the Board of Deacons at least six months notice prior to taking a sabbatical leave in order for them to work together to find supply personnel for the pulpit and to line up the necessary lay leadership to handle various pastoral duties. The Chair of the Board will make arrangements for hospital visits, funeral support, etc.

Sabbatical leave should be taken between the periods of May to November. The pastor would be expected to be in pulpit throughout the Advent and Lenten seasons.

What should a pastor do on sabbatical?

- First, assume that it will take at least two weeks to disconnect from parish life mentally and emotionally. Delay beginning whatever program or plans you have in mind right way. It will take awhile to transition and adjust.
- Keep track of your time well before the sabbatical and at different times of the year. Assess how you spend your time and determine tasks that need to be done while you are away.
- Keep a journal before, during, and after your sabbatical—what you are doing, learning, feeling. This will help you not only discover what the sabbatical is doing for you, it will help when you report back to the congregation, and it will help clergy you are mentoring.
- Plan to be gone completely. Do not return for weddings or funerals, and make this clear before you go. If the congregation is well aware of this before you go, you should not have any problems.
- Make a list of your needs and identify those that are most important to you.

- Make specific goals for your sabbatical, even if your plan is to sleep late, read and rest a lot, and discuss the plans with your board/council or other governing body.
- Don't try to do too much. This is a sabbatical, after all. Save some things for your next sabbatical!
- Assume it will take several months to train your lay people to take over the various functions that are needed: taking care of the mail (be aware of confidentiality issues here), visiting the sick and shut-ins, being on call for emergencies, planning and presiding at liturgies, chairing committee meetings, etc.
- Include the congregation as much as possible in your sabbatical planning. Communicate clearly and ensure they are "on board."
- Reflect on how you want to do your "re-entry" when the sabbatical ends. Be sure to thank and recognize the lay leaders who helped you while you were gone. Be sure to report back--perhaps a written report sent to all members of the congregation.
- Don't assume you'll never get a sabbatical! Start now to make it happen, and it will!

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Books

I recall a chapel speaker telling the student body of Covenant College, "Some of you would sell your mother for a good commentary!" This critique points out what many of us in the ministry deem the one acceptable area of coveting.

I grew up in Germany as an "Army Brat" in the days before the Armed Forces Network included television. My parents took me weekly to the base library. I am convinced that this sparked my love of reading and enabled me to do well in school. Books have opened up a world of information for me.

Whenever I moved while serving as a military chaplain, the packers were always amazed at my professional library. They'd always ask, "How many books do you have, and do you read them?" They weren't too thrilled to box them up, but they're the tools of the trade. I'm thankful there are nearby seminary libraries in my area, but I wasn't always so blessed.

I gauge my spiritual growth by two things: the influence of friends, and the books I've read. I recall as a young Christian reading *The Cross and the Switchblade* and *God's Smuggler*. They were inspiring true stories that opened up a world and worldview that were new to me. The first commentary I read was a devotional one by Harry Ironside. In college I began to collect what was to become my professional library. I recall while in seminary visiting a Presbyterian pastor's office. There had just been a break-in and some office equipment had been stolen. I told him it couldn't have been a seminarian as none of the books had been taken!

In preparing sermons, books become a necessity. I needed my own library. My favorite part of *Christianity Today* magazine was the book reviews. I joined by-mail book clubs, the forerunners of Christian Book Distributors. I discussed books with friends. And I was always reading, at least two books at a time. When I needed a break, I would switch from one to another, but I nearly always finished them.

Many ministers admit they only read non-fiction, but I find novels to be both entertaining and informative. They reveal the human condition and take the reader to far off places. I try to read at least one classic of literature a year. A college professor inspired me to read biographies, and from this I began to preach biographical sermons on the lives of key figures in church history.

I've been asked if I am a speed-reader. It is a difficult question to answer. Some books can be easily and quickly read, while others need to be digested slowly, ponderously. At times one needs to set a book down and think. I find it impossible

to read non-fiction without underlining and making notes in the margins. A book is not mine until I've thoroughly marked it up. I confess I once did this to a signed first edition.

For motivation and record-keeping, I maintain an annual book log in which I record the title and author of every book I've read that year. I can go back and see how I have been influenced. To keep from bragging, I do not show my yearly lists to anyone.

For the past 20 years I have been part of a clergy reading roundtable sponsored by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. We pick books, read one a month, and meet to discuss them. Some were life-changing, and some were frankly dreadful. Yet the lively discussions have always been very satisfying.

I also write book reviews. They haven't been published except in Amazon.com, and occasionally I email my reviews to friends, hoping they'll benefit from what I discovered. If you have especially benefited from a book, shouldn't you tell others?

What are the most influential books I've read, books I would readily recommend to fellow-pastors? Here is my list of the books that shaped me as a pastor and person:

- *Answering God* by Eugene Peterson. Though all his books are rich and reveal a deep thinker with a great heart, this particular one transformed my understanding concerning the nature and flow of prayer in a growing relationship with God.
- *How Should We Then Live?* by Francis Schaeffer, exposes the despair of western culture in light of God's revelation, developing a contrasting Biblical worldview and Christian response to our secular society. Our beliefs determine our behavior.
- *The Valley of Vision*, a Puritan prayer book. Sometimes we lack words, and it is helpful to pray the prayers of others. These are rich, substantive prayers that have enriched my walk with the Lord.

- *From Fear to Faith* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, reveals God's sovereignty and purpose in human suffering, and how to respond when life hurts, within the context of Habakkuk. Lloyd-Jones' most acclaimed book is on the Sermon on the Mount.
- *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis, a clever and profound allegory of good and evil, Heaven and Hell, portraying the consequences of choosing to not be at home with God and holiness.
- *Today's Gospel* by Walter Chantry. This analysis of Mark 10/the Rich Young Ruler helped me understand the doctrine of repentance and the error of "easy believism" while introducing me to Reformed theology.
- *The God Who Loves You* by Peter Kreeft, taking a subject I thought I knew thoroughly; I didn't. Kreeft helped me to appreciate the wonder of God's amazing love.
- *Reality Therapy* by William Glasser, an approach to counseling, affirming that while human needs may be legitimate, how we choose to attain them reveals whether we are behaving maturely or irresponsibly.
- *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* by Robert Webber, which helped me to appreciate liturgy, structure, substance, and reverence in corporate worship.
- *Here I Stand* by Roland Bainton. A biography of Martin Luther that inspired me to take courage and be faithful in spite of opposition (great illustrations also).
- *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, by Cornelius Plantinga Jr., offers a clear and thorough examination of sin dealing with both theology and contemporary issues such as addiction and the ruination of personal relationships.
- *Our Father Abraham* by Marvin Wilson, explains the Hebraic heritage of Christianity and exposes anti-Semitism as anti-Christian, even a kind of self-hatred.

- *The Question of God* by Armand M. Nicholi Jr, a comparison of 2 atheists, C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud, showing how our outlook affects who we are and how we live.
- *Decision Making and the Will of God* by Garry Friessen, a paradigm-shifting look at the wisdom and responsibility God gives us to determine what paths to take.
- Other favorite authors: R.C. Sproul, Warren Wiersbe, C.H. Spurgeon, Phil Yancey, Henri Nouwen, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Graham Green, Thomas Merton, Chaim Potok, James Montgomery Boice, and John Stott.

Mark Twain noted, “The man who does not read has no advantage over the man who cannot read.” What books do you read and need? A pastor needs Bible commentaries, theological works, church history and biographies, language helps, books on psychology and family life, archeology, spirituality, world religions, philosophy, prayer books and devotional reading. Read outside of your tradition occasionally. Occasionally do some light, pleasure reading.

What about lending books? I have found the hard way who not to lend to. When I do share, I keep a record of the book, who’s borrowing it, and the date. C.S. Lewis was asked if we would have books in Heaven and quipped, “Only the ones we were willing to lend.”

What about E-books? I’m not against them; you’re reading one. I prefer reading fiction on my tablet. You need to decide for yourself if e-books are adequate for your needs. I find it easier to locate things in a physical book I’ve marked up. There is something comforting about physical books. In my book-lined study I am surrounded by friends.

Dedication of new pew Bibles

Hymn: “How Firm a Foundation”

Readers: the Board of Deacons

Reader #1: The Bible is an invitation to know God. We cannot know the Scriptures until we are willing to be changed by them.

Reader #2: The Holy Scriptures tell us what we could never learn any other way: They tell us what we are, who we are, how we got here, why we are here, and what we are required to do while we remain here.

Reader #3: The Bible not only tells us how God sought His people in the past; it is also a means by which He seeks us out today.

Reader #4: A person can spend a lifetime before the Bible—reading, meditating, studying, teaching, and writing—and never exhaust it.

Reader #5: As God accomplished His purpose in the writers of Scripture, He can do the same in the readers of Scripture.

Reader #6: The Bible is the crib in which the Christ Child comes to us.

Reader #7: Scripture reading, Psalm 119:9-16

Reader #8: From the preface of the NIV: “The Committee on Bible Translation held to certain goals for the New International Version—that it would be an accurate translation and one that would have clarity and literary quality and so prove suitable for public and private reading, teaching, preaching, memorizing and liturgical use...its translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible; they believe that it contains the divine answer to the deepest needs of humanity, that it sheds unique light on our path in a dark world, and that it sets forth the way to our eternal well-being.”

Pastor: Let us pray... True and Living Word among us, we honor the Holy Scriptures and ask Your blessing on these our new pew Bibles, that they may guide us, as we are taught the message that gives life. Sanctify all who read, hear, and obey Your word of truth. In Your thrice-holy Name, Amen.

We now present these Bibles to the church, to be used in our worship and instruction—for the glory of God!



Usher/Greeter procedures

While taking a year of Clinical Pastoral Education I had the freedom to attend a local church, and so my wife and I visited a church not far away. We were impressed with the worship and the preaching, so we returned the next Sunday. The usher greeted us at the door: “Hi Bob and Laura, I’m so glad to see you again.” Needless to say, we were impressed. Several months later I told the pastor about this, and he was impressed! Here are some guidelines for ushers...

- Hospitality is at the heart of your ministry. Try to warmly greet people by name. Your welcome is one of the first impressions people have of the congregation. The first thing people look for in a church is whether people are friendly.
- Prepare yourself spiritually; before beginning, pray that God will help you and use you for His glory.
- Stand at the sanctuary entrance no later than a half hour before the service. For those already seated, notice if they have bulletins.
- Grab a breath mint before going on duty.
- Smile, introduce yourself, be engaging and courteous, make eye-contact and shake hands. Be friendly but not *overly* friendly--don’t come on *too strong*.
- Walk through the sanctuary and check for neatness; pick up any loose paper and straighten out the books in the pews.
- Turn on the lights as appropriate.
- Bulletins should be placed at the entrance; if not, check the church office.
- Be especially aware of any first-time visitors. Offer to answer any questions. Let them know where the restrooms and fellowship hall are, and give them a visitors card. If possible, try to introduce visitors to the Pastor before or after the service, and encourage them to stay for fellowship.

- Often newcomers don't notice the coat rack; point it out to them.
- If they have an infant, provide information about the church nursery, but don't insist they use it, only if they wish to. Greet the children as well with a hello and a smile. Let them know about the Sunday School.
- Greet the regulars as well, but don't use this time for fellowship. Catch up later after the service, otherwise people may be waiting to get into the sanctuary.
- Help any in need of operating the handicap chair lift.
- Advise the Pastor or worship leader about any changes, problems, urgent prayer requests or instructions.
- Take an attendance head count, to include children in watch-care and Children's church.
- When the Pastor announces the offering, the ushers will proceed to the front in two ranks then form one line before the altar to receive the plates. After all have been given the plates, begin receiving the offering.
- Brief the pastor on any interesting conversations you have. This can be useful in building relationships and learning about the perceptions of visitors.
- Assist anyone who becomes ill. Know where first-aid kits are located, and if any church members are medical professionals.
- Check the temperature.
- If children disturb the service, an usher should pleasantly and tactfully suggest to the parents that they take the child to the nursery.
- Insure that late-comers have a place to sit.
- After the service help straighten the pew racks and the literature areas.
- Set up folding chairs if/when necessary.
- Church security—15 minutes after the service starts lock all doors but the front door.
- Recognize that what you are doing is ministry.

- Remember that you are here to worship also. Be a good example by singing and participating. Let the service minister to your needs.

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Tips for Scripture Readers

A good public reading invites listeners into the text. I recall hearing Rev. Warren Wiersbe read a Scripture passage and when he finished, I felt I understood the passage better. Scripture readers need some preparation ...

- Read the passage in its context and think about what it means; let it speak to you.
- Whether you prefer it or not, read from the translation of the pew Bibles.
- Pray—ask God to use you as His ambassador to convey His word to the congregation. Believe that God will use His word.
- Print out the passage in large print, double-spaced for easier reading.
- Practice—read the passage aloud a few times.
- Introduce the text simply; for example: “Our reading today is _____.” Conclude with “The word of the Lord” or “May God add His blessing on the reading and keeping of His word.”
- Delivery—use emotion, inflection and conviction; be expressive yet conversational; it’s a reading, not a performance.
- Take your time; don’t rush the reading.
- Relax—the congregation knows you and they’re on your side... besides, they won’t be staring at you but reading along in their Bibles.
- Ignore distractions. If you show they don’t bother you, they won’t bother the congregation.
- Unsure of pronunciation? Listen to an audio recording of the passage (you can do so at www.biblegateway.com)
- When it is your turn to read, sit where you can easily and quickly come forward so there’s no “dead space” while people wait for you.

A famous actor gave a public reading of the 23rd Psalm that impressed his audience, but then an elderly minister was asked to also read it, and the listeners were brought to tears. The actor was asked why and he said: “I know the 23rd Psalm; *he* knows the Shepherd.”

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House Blessings

When people move into a new home it is appropriate to dedicate their home, and here is a sample service for such an occasion...

Peace be with this house and with all who live and enter here. Peace on the outside comes from knowing God on the inside.

Readings from God’s Holy Word:

- “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1).
- “By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures” (Proverbs 24:3-4).
- Jesus promises, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

A home of one’s own is a special blessing; it brings a sense of being rooted, and is a foretaste of our permanent, secure home with the Lord.

May this home be a place of rest, renewal and refreshment for the _____ family.

May the light of Christ always shine in this home.

We have invited Christ into our hearts; we now invite Him into this home.

May God's Word always guide those dwelling here, for His glory.

May our desire for God's blessing reflect that of Jabez, who prayed: "Oh, that You O Lord would bless me indeed and help me in my work. Be with me in all that I do; may Your hand be with me, and keep me from all evil and disaster that I may not cause pain" (1 Chronicles 4:10).

There's an old German saying: "Everything depends on God's blessing." Unless God blesses our efforts, unless He is a part of our endeavors, our effort is worthless. We trust the will of God's Providence, and we echo the vow of Joshua: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Let us pray:

Lord God, bless this home and all who dwell therein. May Jesus be the unseen Guest at every meal, the companion of every conversation. May this dwelling be Your home as well. May love embrace this family and Your Spirit empower them. Anoint this home and cause it to become a place of treasured memories... All for Your glory and praise, in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Benediction: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, the Lord be gracious to you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6).

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Visitors

Those who visit the church need follow-up: a phone call, an email, a visit. In my own visiting of churches I've noticed two extremes: ignoring and smothering visitors. A nice touch is a visitor gift-bag with a church mug, pen, and some printed material.

Do not ask visitors to stand and introduce themselves; simply be on the lookout for new faces, and approach them with a friendly welcome. Engage in light conversation and encourage them to fill out a visitor's card and stay for coffee afterwards. Then follow up with a letter, a phone call, and offer to visit them at their home.

Sample visitor's letter:

Dear _____,

Welcome! It was a great pleasure to have you worship with us. We hope that you found our service spiritually refreshing and the congregation friendly and helpful. We'd like to get better acquainted and we would be delighted if you decide to make _____ your church home.

Please let us know if we can be of any assistance to you. The worship and religious education programs of our church are designed to glorify God and nurture the personal growth of believers.

We offer Sunday School for all ages, teen youth group, social & craft groups, food pantry ministry, children, adult and praise choirs. Childcare is available and Children's Church during worship. We hope you'll regularly attend our services and that you'll become involved. If you have a talent, interest or ability you'd like to use for God, please let us know.

Should you have any prayer requests or a need for pastoral counseling, please give us a call. Or simply drop by the office for a cup of coffee and a chat.

Again, thanks for visiting; we look forward to seeing you again next Sunday!

Most churches have **pew cards** for visitors. You can purchase them from church suppliers, or make your own. Here is one we used at a church I served, which both visitors and attendees can use:

-A note to the Pastor-

Name _____

- ☐ I'm a visitor (address/phone on back)
- ☐ I'd like a home visit from the Pastor
- ☐ I need a ride to church
- ☐ I'd like information on church membership
- ☐ I'd like information on baptism
- ☐ Favorite hymn request (on back)
- ☐ I'd like to get the sermons by email
- ☐ I'd like someone to call on a prospective Member (info on back)
- ☐ Someone is ill/hospitalized (info on back)
- ☐ I'd like church offering envelopes
- ☐ I'd like to receive the church newsletter
- ☐ I'd like to offer my skills/talent (explain on back)
- ☐ I'd like information on Sunday School
- ☐ Change of Address (on back)
- ☐ Prayer Request (on back)

*Please place card in the offering plate or
hand to our Pastor after worship*

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Inactive Members

In the *Jewish Journal*, a local newspaper, I read of an inter-faith couple. The wife was Jewish, the husband was described as a “non-practicing Methodist.” There are lots of non-practicing people who at one time were involved with their churches. What happened? I was interviewed by a ministry organization and asked what frustrated me most about being a pastor. I answered, “Inactive members. I really care about them, they’re nice people, but I can’t understand why they’re not attending. Some are people who’ve not been attending since before I even arrived in town.”

Part of the fault is with the church. Some churches fail to meet the needs of their people. The sermons aren’t relevant, and the worship may not be appealing. Worship styles vary among churches; some are lively and informal; others are liturgical and ritualistic. Some are a blend of the formal and informal. The conflict

isn't necessarily between guitars and pipe organs, but the general tone of what goes on. Another factor may be about worldview. Conservative churches uphold the inspiration and authority of the Bible, whereas more liberal congregations do not accept everything in Scripture as God's final, absolute word. Some churches are very socially conscious, even political, while others some avoid controversy. Some churches hold unique doctrinal beliefs. The point is, people should find a church where they mostly agree with what is being taught.

Churches may be at fault, but part of the blame is with those who have departed. If they had a bad experience, they could try another church. Instead they stay away from the worship, instruction and fellowship they could be having, which would enrich their lives. Someone at the church may have offended the now non-practicing person, yet they only hurt themselves by no longer attending. People claim they worship God while taking a nature walk; just how much praying actually goes on in the woods? Do they take a Bible with them, do they really focus on God, and do they supplement their study with religious books, magazines, and music? What do they do about the Lord's Supper? Are they teaching their children about God? What materials are they using to provide their kids a religious education? Or are they "non-practicing" in every sense of the term? The Apostle John, describing people who've departed said, "They went out from us because they were not of us" (1 John 2:19).

Being a Christian without attending church is like being a Boy Scout, a Mason, or a Rotarian who doesn't participate in their meetings, or a student who doesn't go to class. The author of Hebrews tells us that we're accountable to God: "Let us not neglect our assembling together, as some are in the habit of doing; instead let's encourage one another, now that the Day of His coming back is drawing near" (Heb 10:25). Some drop out right after Confirmation. I tell the teens in my church's Confirmation Class, "The real confirmation of your faith comes after you receive your certificate."

So why should anyone attend a church? Here's my *Top-Ten* List:

10. You'll get to meet some great people.
9. You'll learn about God and His plan for your life.
8. You'll find out how to get to and get ready for Heaven.
7. You'll find purpose in life and discover what life's all about.
6. You'll gain help and encouragement in dealing with personal problems and life's hardships.
5. You'll see opportunities to serve God with your talents.
4. You'll receive help in teaching your children values.
3. You'll live longer, according to medical studies.
2. You'll benefit from pastoral care from trained, professional clergy
1. You'll discover that the Bible directs us to worship God, Who is worthy of our praise!

If you've gotten "out of the habit", determine that you'll put God first and return to church. They'll be delighted to see you back, and they'll welcome you with open arms. You might even get your old pew back, if someone else isn't sitting there!

Someone told me once, a while back, "Whenever I pass my little church I stay for a visit; so when I die and go up there the Lord won't ask, 'Who is it?'"

A letter to inactive members...

Dear Member,

Our Board of Deacons is in the process of reviewing our church membership roll and we're contacting inactive members, old and new, who may be out of touch with our ministries here at _____.

We haven't seen you in some time, yet we're your church family. We miss you! We're accountable to God, Who tells us in Hebrews 10:25, "*Let us not neglect our assembling*

together, as some are in the habit of doing; instead let's encourage one another, now that the Day of His coming back again is drawing near." Have you "gotten out of the habit", or is there something else keeping you from church? Are you struggling with faith issues, doubts, or has someone at church offended you in some way? Don't hurt your spiritual growth by staying away from church. God is worthy of our praise. Grow with us, be reconciled, find answers in Scripture, and honor God through our meaningful worship, instruction, fellowship and opportunities to serve God with your talents.

We love and care about you here at your church. If you come back, we promise not to "throw the Book" at you! And we promise the roof won't cave in! Make time for God. If there's any way we can help or encourage you, please call on me.

Our Constitution & Bylaws include guidelines for the removal or transfer of members not currently active within the church. Provision is made for Associate Membership, which is intended for those who wish to maintain or create a strong Christian tie with our congregation yet also sustain full membership and good standing with another church. Associate members do not have voting privileges.

We would like to encourage you to attend an upcoming Sunday worship service. We don't want you to be inactive! Let us know if you'd like a visit from our pastor. If you wish to transfer your membership to a church you are currently attending, or prefer to maintain an Associate Membership with our church, please let us know by mail, telephone, or email.

We look forward to hearing from you.

"No Excuse Sunday"

Sometimes when people are invited to church they have reasons they can't attend. A church held a "No Excuse Sunday". Here's what they provided:

- Cots in the foyer for those who claim Sunday is the only day to sleep late.

- Eye drops for those with tired eyes from watching TV too late on Saturday night.
- Construction-worker “hard-hats” for those who claim “If I show up the roof will fall in”.
- Blankets for those who think the church is too cold;
- Fans for those who think it’s too hot.
- Hearing aids for those who can’t hear the minister;
- Ear plugs for those who can.
- A “no pressure” offering.
- Coffee before *and* after church.
- Poinsettias and Lilies for those who only come on Christmas and Easter.
- No dress code for those who say they’ve nothing to wear.
- Scoreboards posted for those who are missing football and hockey games.
- Internet access so no one misses their email.
- Round TUITs for those who say they’ll come when they get “a round to it.”

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Interim Ministry

I received a call from a denominational official that a nearby church needed an Interim Pastor. I had never served as one, but I was familiar with short-term ministry from having been an Army Chaplain. The church was in crisis and needed someone to provide compassionate pastoral care. I agreed, came out of retirement, and served for a year and a half. It was a wonderful experience. I am currently in my third Interim pastorate. Here are some personal observations on this unique ministry.

Many churches go through two or three Interim Pastors during the transition period, and that is rarely a good thing. The instability hurts the church. The first decision I made was to stay the course. I resolved to remain in place until the congregation

found a settled pastor, however long that might take. This gave the parish a sense of stability.

I had to assess the congregation's needs, assure them that I cared about the challenges they were facing, and determine by God's grace to be part of the solution. I think most churches in this uneasy time need encouragement and nurturing. I heard of an Interim Minister who announced to a congregation: "I'm not your pastor; I'm a consultant." I was not about to follow his example. I did advise the church, but as their pastor. I heard so many horror stories of Interim Ministers who were toxic that I began to wonder if the mission of the Interim was to upset the congregation so much that they'd welcome with relief their settled pastor!

I've heard of Interims who came armed with a rototiller. Interims need to find out whether the church wants or needs change. If the church is healthy, it may simply need to be maintained and sustained. Some interims help churches re-define themselves, or at least to clarify their vision, mission, and priorities.

Interim pastors come to churches with fresh eyes and some creative ideas... but they need to wait and not try to fix what may not be broken. Interims need to gain the trust of the congregation before making suggestions, or they might well be seen as meddlesome outsiders. I waited till the people were confident in my leadership, and then they welcomed my suggestions. Interims need to adapt to the church and do things *their* way. For example, if their previous minister wore a pulpit robe, they should do so too; don't buck the system.

It is important to ask for a written job description and come up with a mutual agreement regarding pastoral responsibilities. One might wish to negotiate for things which may be outside of the scope of the church's expectations. It is important to know if you are expected to teach classes, attend board and committee meetings, do home visits, and the level of your community involvement.

Get a copy of the church calendar, photo directory, and list of organizations within the church. Meet the staff. Look at their website and social media page. Find out if anyone needs immediate pastoral attention. Learn the notification process for getting informed about matters. Ask whether the worship is traditional, contemporary, or blended. Know what outside groups use the facility. Ask about local funeral homes and hospitals. Find out if there are any new programs the church wants to consider. Learn why the previous pastor left. Above all, try to assess the spiritual condition of the parish.

At one church I served, after being on board for three months, the church assembled a Pastoral Search Committee and invited me to serve as their advisor. I attended all meetings and helped the group determine what kind of pastor they wanted. Every meeting we made progress. I did some networking in my denomination and helped find them a well-qualified minister who is doing an outstanding job.

Many Interims have little or nothing to do with the town's Clergy Association. That is unfortunate, as these groups can be a wealth of information and encouragement. You will learn things about the church you might not know otherwise, and likely initiate some friendships. Being a team-player is a good thing. As an Interim I was welcomed and utilized at town-wide inter-faith events.

Let the church know that simply getting a new pastor won't cause them to grow. A pastor isn't a panacea. The numeric growth of the church is primarily the congregation's responsibility, as they work within their spheres of influence to encourage people they know to attend. The number one reason people attend a church is because someone there invited them.

Pastors pour their hearts into preparing substantive sermons for one brief day. We've all wished that others could hear a message we believe is important. By becoming an interim, now others can. And the Interim Pastor has an opportunity for

more research and reflection, presenting a vastly improved sermon to a new congregation.

Interim ministry is short-term ministry. You hit the ground running and do all the good you can in the limited time you have. You try to make the church as healthy and productive as you can so the new pastor will walk into a healthy church, not one that needs fixing.

When the church calls a settled pastor, the Interim ought to meet with the incoming pastor and offer a candid assessment of the needs of the congregation, answer any questions, and offer encouragement. During the time between the church's call and the new pastor's arrival, the Interim's mode of operation shifts to prepare for his arrival. "He must increase and I must decrease." Your last Sunday is a literal or figurative "passing of the stole," a transition. Make it so you can finish and the settled pastor can begin on a positive note.

When I retired I was tired, and didn't want to do part-time Interim Ministry...but as time went on and I got some rest, I was happy to give it a try, and it was a wonderful experience. I have to admit that part of the joy was not having the full weight of the church's success on my shoulders, not that it ever was there, but like many pastors I often felt that way. As an Interim I didn't feel that burden. Maybe this was God telling me it never was my burden. Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord Almighty."

What Interim Ministers Need:

- Copy of church worship bulletin
- Church calendar
- Parish photo directory
- Contact information for church leadership
- Major events coming up
- Important customs, holidays, and annual events

- Baptism, funeral and wedding policies
- Newsletter
- Groups using the facility
- Annual Report
- Information on the local Clergy Association
- Local funeral home(s)
- Church organizations
- New ideas the church may want to consider
- Office hours
- Coffee shop where the locals hang out
- Sermon log of previous pastor
- An assessment of the spiritual/emotional needs

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Longevity

Studies indicate that long-term pastorates build churches. They certainly provide stability, and are preferable to having a pastoral change every few years. However, in some cases, a long-term pastorate produces stagnation, weariness, complacency, even laziness. Congregations may need a new, fresh voice, a new vision, and long-term pastors eventually come to the point where they have little more to offer. I've been told, "It's better to leave too soon than to stay too long." I have known of ministers who have become an institution, and whose voice takes on an authority beyond what ought to be expressed. The opposite can also be true; pastors can remain so long that their authority and gravitas is gone. They are largely ignored and taken for granted. Familiarity breeds indifference.

At a church I served, a former pastor with no retirement plan literally stayed till he died. I was told that in his final years his effectiveness was questionable (to put it

kindly). After his death, the church changed their constitution to specify that when pastors turn 70 they must step down. Even ministers with an adequate retirement plan may not wish to leave, and it becomes an act of disloyalty to suggest retirement. But what is best for the church? “How can we miss you if you don’t go away?”

One thing I learned as a pastor was, “It’s not about me.” One day I will be gone and the church will go on without me. I need to care less about my “legacy” and more about feeding the flock in the limited time I have. A few people may leave when a pastor departs, but most stay because of their commitment to the church and because it is where their friends are.

When long-term pastors finally leave, some stay in the area, and occasionally in the congregation. This can make things difficult for the next pastor. In all fairness, some ministers do not have a place to call home except where they’ve served. If they own a home in town they should worship at another local church to give room for the new pastor. I find nothing wrong with maintaining some contacts, but we need to be careful not to undermine or criticize the new regime.

So how long is long enough? There is no definitive answer. At my longest pastorate, the previous three pastors stayed an average of 15 years. I stayed 17, which seemed good. I had a sense of satisfaction that I followed the example of my predecessors and stayed the course. It was enough time to make a lasting impact in the lives of many, enough time to cover a lot of teaching, and enough time to leave with a sense of accomplishment.

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Random wisdom & advice

(A few of these are taken from my previous book, *The Challenge of the Chaplaincy*)

- Pastors are fallible messengers proclaiming an infallible message.

- Each year write a birthday (for adults, teens, and children) and an anniversary letter and mail them out to the congregation.
- Freely share your experience and wisdom with peers and especially younger pastors and seminarians. Be a mentor.
- Try a mobile phone/tablet photo directory APP, which can be updated anytime. Printed directories can be out-of-date within a few months.
- Have good quality business cards.
- Use social media to promote the ministries of your church.
- Play recorded sacred instrumental music before the service to set a worshipful tone and convey a friendly, inviting atmosphere.
- Know your community—its history, geography, culture, sports, and people. Determine to be the pastor of the community, not just your congregation.
- Drink coffee where the locals hang out.
- Churches resist change and believe change should be gradual... unless they *like* your idea.
- Some people will treat you as a “religious service provider”; try to help them see you as their pastor.
- Being a pastor is a *walk in the park... Jurassic Park*, but a park!
- You can have nothing on your calendar for a particular day and end up having a very full and busy day.
- The stress on your family will likely be greater than you expect.
- People may say you lack experience... time will take care of that.
- Jesus will not be saying “Well done, good and *successful* servant.”
- You can lose yourself in your pastoral role, which so defines you to the point where you can become isolated from others.
- “You are a pastor to people who are in the lion’s den, to men and women facing wild beasts in the Colosseum” (Eugene Peterson).
- Join the town’s Clergy Association; you may be their only conservative voice, and if not, you’ll have some camaraderie. You may find unexpected allies.

- Who is your pastor? You need one. A pastor who is his own pastor has a fool for a pastor. Self-care doesn't work.
- Help your church create a mission/vision statement, put it on your bulletin cover, and have everyone recite it together at the start of worship.
- Don't wear a façade. Perhaps you doubt God's ability to work through a "real" person. Be who you are. Being accepted by God frees us to be authentically ourselves.
- Find or compile a Social Service Directory—you'll need one for referrals.
- Join a local civic organization, like the Lions Club or Rotary.
- If you are a veteran, join the American Legion or VFW. Offer to pray at your town's Memorial Day and Veterans Day observances.
- Attend public school concerts and sporting events. Be seen in your town.
- Decorate your office to create an orderly, friendly, comfortable environment. Don't talk to people from behind your desk, which can be seen as a barrier.
- Don't spend too much time reenlisting inactive members; they left for a reason. Focus on attracting new people.
- Pain is inevitable; misery is optional. Watch your perceptions. We see life, not as it is, but as we are.
- Pain is universal and unique. We all have it, but in different ways.
- You may need to be prophetic...do not be pharisaical or obnoxious. The goal of critique is to help, not hurt.
- Communication is going beyond what is said to what is meant.
- You will be compared to the previous pastor. You are not that person. If told "You have big shoes to fill" tell them "I brought my own shoes."
- Not everything you try will work, but take some risks.
- Every pastor translates the text of the Bible into everyday life.
- Scriptures say that ministers are to "manage" their family well...not convert; that's the job of the Holy Spirit.

- The place you live may change frequently, but your personal items make each place uniquely your home...and it takes at least 3 months to feel moved in.
- Find the ministry in administrative tasks.
- Wherever you go, root for the local and regional sports teams.
- A “zero-defects” mentality is unrealistic and unattainable.
- You may at times have to be prophetic, to confront people. Don’t be obnoxious or pharisaical. The goal of correction is to help.
- You need to schedule in time for thinking.
- Theodicy is becoming more and more important as people living in the middle of God’s story question His love amid their suffering. People need healing, hope, and the ability to live with mystery, with unanswered questions.
- If you are near a military base initiate “Invite a service member to dinner” and get to know the chaplains. Invite one to preach occasionally. Perhaps you can participate in their on-base professional development.
- Have photos of Sunday School teachers outside of their classrooms.
- Send press releases about special events to local newspapers and websites.
- Have a Church Photographer. Post photos on social media, your webpage, and to the local media.
- Start a Couples’ Club.
- Have some round tables and chairs in the fellowship hall.
- Get a display case for historic items or seasonal displays.
- Write a *Clergy Column* for the local newspaper.
- Appreciated parishioners rarely complain.
- Celebrate our Jewish heritage—observe a Seder, have Hanukkah and Purim parties. Have groups visit a local synagogue. Participate in Holocaust Remembrance days.
- Have a Nominating Committee to recruit people for boards, and let people know what they are signing up for.
- Start a moms play group...it can lead to a bigger Sunday School.

- Lead a Bible Study at your town's Senior Center.
- Stay true to your denomination. Don't fly false colors.
- Represent your church at community functions like domestic violence vigils, town fairs, and homecomings.
- Be a highly-motivated self-starter. Unlike other jobs, you're not likely to be overly supervised; do not take advantage of that. Work hard.
- Keep Sunday announcements brief and early. Don't let them interrupt the worship. One exception: Announce the next sermon before the Benediction.
- Have someone to confess to regularly.
- Have interests that have nothing to do with your ministry.
- Find a means of ongoing professional development. At a minimum, keep reading.
- Work smarter, not harder.
- Don't do more with less—do less more effectively.

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Clergy Retirement

Most of what we read about retirement covers the financial aspects, which are important, but being financially able to retire does not address more significant issues. What will your new life *look like*? It's been said, "Don't simply retire *from* something; have something to retire *to*." Have a plan.

Some people deride clergy retirement, claiming "There's no retirement in the Bible." Actually there *is*. In Numbers 8:24 we're told that "at the age of fifty, the priests must retire from their regular service and work no longer." Don't let people make you feel guilty for retiring. Tell the critics, "I never apologize for being blessed."

If you are in a long-term pastorate it can be very difficult to step down, both for you and the congregation. Yet we gradually and inevitably begin to lose the energy and

effectiveness for this demanding work. The congregation may need a fresh voice, a new direction. Ministers who try to keep on going often don't have the financial means to retire, which means they have not planned for the future. Saying "I'll just work till I die" is unrealistic.

When you step down as pastor, your last sermon needs to be reassurance that the church will go on because the life of the church is Christ, not the pastor. "It's not about me; it never was," I told my congregation when I retired. God will sustain His church. Keep your remarks positive. Close with a blessing, and even if saying goodbye is difficult, allow for a dinner in your honor; it is a ritual your congregation needs, even if you don't. To depart without ceremony will cause bitterness.

When you finally step down, where should you live? Many pastors have led a wandering life so the concept of "home" is fluid. Retirement is a good time to relocate to a place where you can be comfortable. Do some research and take some trips to check out possible retirement places. Take into consideration climate, recreation, healthcare and volunteer opportunities. As a retired Army chaplain, I made sure to retire near a military base to take advantage of my benefits.

Retirement is not a permanent vacation of playing golf, sleeping in and eating out. There are service options for retired clergy who want them. The AARP encourages seniors to "serve, not to be served," to do something of value. Financial guru Dave Ramsey notes, "We have a retirement crisis in America today, not from a lack of money, but from a lack of vision." One retiree admitted he felt like there was a hole in his life that needed to be filled.

Retirement offers opportunities to engage in what has been called "encore careers", part-time ministries you've never done but are attracted to. This could include Christian camping, teaching, homeless ministries, fire/police/healthcare chaplaincies, para-church organizations, recreational ministries and missionary work. Let your local funeral home know you're available. Retired military chaplains can continue to

serve in organizations such as the Civil Air Patrol, the Coast Guard Auxiliary or at state or federal veterans' homes. And they now have time for some AMC flights. A pastor close to retirement cautioned, "Never see yourself as having retired from serving Christ and using your gifts for His Kingdom." Amen.

A lot of retirees say that retirement seems like a job for much younger people. They are busier being retired than when they were working. Decide just how busy you want to be. You don't want to take on a position where you're exchanging one exhausting set of responsibilities for another.

Retired clergy enjoy something new: Going to church with their spouse and sitting together for worship. You will need to find a church, and that may take time. Then get involved, but not too much. If you are musically inclined, join the worship team. Teach Sunday School or lead a Bible Study. Offer to bring Communion to shut-ins. Since every pastor needs a pastor, offer to be a sounding board for the minister. Offer to preach when the pastor is sick or on vacation.

You have accumulated a lifetime of knowledge, and retirement can be a time to share that. Be a mentor of younger clergy or seminarians. Write a book. I wrote *The Challenge of the Chaplaincy* which includes lessons learned from my military career. I had a Chaplain in the Pentagon tell me "I'd have killed to have this when I was a Lieutenant." I published my book as an Amazon Kindle e-book at no cost, but I mostly sent it out to people in a PDF version.

Maybe there's a project you've always wanted to do. You now have the time. Possibly your dream has been to take a pilgrimage to Israel or to the countries of the Reformation. Perhaps there's a hobby your busyness has kept you from pursuing. There's always that stack of books you've been meaning to read.

Consider Interim ministry. After a year of retirement I was rested and ready and gladly agreed to serve a church in transition for a year and a half. I found that

working part-time was significantly easier than full-time ministry. It has been a very positive experience.

In my denomination (the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference) we have Area and Regional ministers who oversee geographical regions. Since most are pastors, they have limited opportunity to visit the pastors and churches in their area. This would be an ideal position for retired clergy. Retired Chaplains usually serve as Ecclesiastical Endorsers for the chaplains in their denomination. It is a satisfying way to reconnect to the military.

As you approach retirement, people will ask, “What are you going to do?” A recently retired friend of mine complained about this oft-asked question. “Why do I have to do something?” he complained. Don’t jump into new work right away. Take time to rest, reflect, refresh and recharge--without guilt. And take time to consider what should come next. My first year of retirement I did a lot of reading and kayaking. You’ve been driven for so long, so your first year of retirement should be without heavy responsibilities.

In a study of retirement one thing was confirmed: retirement is better than working. That may seem obvious, but retirement is often a time when one’s overall happiness and health improve. People who retire live longer. Hopefully you can retire with fond memories and no regrets.

Enjoy your retirement. You deserve it.

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Final Thoughts

A pastor reflected that he had no idea that he was expected to be an expert in so many areas. We can’t be proficient in everything, so we keep learning and doing our best. We are General Practitioners, not specialists.

The challenge of pastoral ministry is that this is a demanding, often discouraging, and blessed calling. Every day comes with new challenges. Being a pastor is certainly not boring or routine; there's no such thing as "business as usual." Seminaries stress doctrinal purity but don't mention the need for creativity. There is an art to being a minister in that we are constantly creating: sermons, classes, liturgy, publicity, activities, programs, selecting and rehearsing music. We are interacting with people who have unique personalities and issues. We are ever learning and growing, and when we come to the end, we write a book about it.

Soli Deo Gloria

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