

S U C C E S S *and the* NEW PASTOR

by Peg Nowling



Nowling is pastor of First [American] Baptist Church in Lafayette, Indiana.

Clergy know the drill. Interviews have taken place via the telephone and face to face. References have been checked. The search committee has made the decision: YOU ARE THE ONE. Eventually, you say goodbye to your present congregation and make the move to this strange new place. Your new ministry begins, and you vow not to make the same mistakes you made at the last church. You will stand up for yourself. You will take your days off. You will spend more evenings at home. You will spend more time in prayer and study. But in short order, time gets away, and you wonder what happened to all your good intentions.

It happens to all of us.

Recently, I was invited to preach at the church where I'd previously served as associate minister. It was a glorious reunion, especially because their days of looking for a new senior pastor had ended. They'd been searching for two long years. He would be arriving in the next month, so I took advantage of the moment and talked with them about ways to make his pastorate a success. Of course, I drew upon my own experiences, but also on the experiences of others. This is what I wanted them to hear . . .

Right now, members of the Pastoral Search Committee (PSC) are overwhelmed with relief. You think your job is done. But in some ways, your job is just beginning. In ministry, we have something called "a honeymoon period." During this time, the pastor can fall on his or her face and be easily forgiven. Grace is extended because the new pastor may be "young," "still getting to know us," or "consumed with the job." This is not the time for the PSC to fade away.

PSC members should also serve with the Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC), intent on helping the new pastor settle in

with some familiar faces close at hand. Our church bylaws allow the pastor to choose two persons for the PRC while the other three are appointed by the council. In my case, I did choose two members from the search committee. There is probably no wrong way to put the PRC together as long as the pastor is permitted to have input. The point is **do not abandon the new pastor.**

The Move and Getting Off to a Good Start

Moving is stressful under any circumstances. Former PSC members (among others) can help ease the stress on your new pastor and family by providing meals in the first few days. You can either bring food to the house or invite them out to a restaurant or to your home. Meal preparation is the last thing they want to worry about when they can't even find the can opener.

Offer to help, but allow the family to decide what kind of help is needed. Perhaps childcare would be helpful. Some might appreciate help unpacking the kitchen. Others might not. Make the offer. And remember, it takes time to settle in.

A word of caution: If you do help them unpack, don't share too much with members of the congregation. The age of the pastor's shower curtain is no one else's business. On an episode of the television show "Seventh Heaven," the pastor's wife was expecting twins. The women of the church decided to throw a baby shower for her - at her own home with just twenty-four hours' notice. Since the pastor and his wife lived in the church parsonage, some church members considered it their duty to inspect the home. They looked in cupboards, bedrooms, and even bathtubs. Humorous? Yes. Appropriate? No.

Sunday

We all like to maximize our time, but please don't use Sunday mornings as a

time to hold discussions with your pastor.

In my own case, I arrive at church about two hours before worship. I check messages from the weekend, make sure that nothing has been overlooked, and go over my sermon one last time. I just like being there early. I have colleagues who don't share my enthusiasm. Arriving early gives people the opportunity to seize the moment and discuss or complain about something. Therefore, these pastors arrive only moments before the service begins. Having served with someone who subscribes to this second philosophy, I must say it's nerve-wracking to those (especially to associate pastors) who are waiting for the pastor to make an entrance.

However, their reasons are valid. One Sunday, a usually upbeat member found me in the sanctuary going over my sermon notes. He was distressed about some young families that had left the church almost a year ago. Over the past week he'd spoken to someone from this group and shared with me his concern that the church was dying. I tried to assure him that I saw great hope, but my own good mood was rapidly sinking. After our conversation ended, I returned to my office to pray and pull myself together.

I know that we should say, "I just can't give you the time you deserve right now. Would you call me tomorrow so we can set up a time to talk?" Usually it isn't that easy. An even better solution is to encourage parishioners to make appointments. "Dumping" on the pastor as we're entering worship is never a good idea. When we're sorting through a raft of last-minute "problems," it robs us of the joy of worship.

It takes time to memorize the names of all church members. If your church doesn't use name tags, think about beginning before the new pastor even arrives. Using them at meetings is also helpful, particularly in the beginning. It's embarrassing when you want to address someone

but the name escapes you. Guests and new members also like name tags. It allows people to greet one another by name.

If you've given the pastor information on a Sunday morning, call on Monday to make sure the information registered. This is particularly important in the early days of a pastorate when names and faces sometimes float about in the brain, independent of each other. For example, don't say, "By the way, I'm having a heart transplant on Tuesday and would like you to be there," and walk away. Be fair. No one can greet groups of people and remember everything. Even in a smaller congregation, pastors find they can't retain all the information given to them on a Sunday.

*If a pastoral visit is
important to you, invite
the pastor over!*

Visitation Expectations

If a pastoral visit is important to you, invite the pastor over! I was reared in a time when the pastor and family were often invited to homes for meals. Today, things have changed. Different generations have different opinions about pastoral visits. Although the older generations still expect visits from the pastor, the younger ones consider home as sacred space. Some folks don't mind the pastor dropping in unannounced, while others would be offended. Someone once asked me if I found it difficult to connect with people at home. When I said that I never make unannounced visits, this person was surprised. In his day, pastors always just dropped by. However, those days are gone. Much time would be spent going from place to place just looking for someone at home.

An additional piece of the puzzle is that people live farther from church today so a visit that once took a half hour may now take two hours. The pastor wants to make visits but weekly responsibilities and crises take up much time. Reach out with a helping hand. Don't put all the visitation responsibilities on the pastor.*

The former PSC (or some other group) might consider gathering the members into small groups at homes, according to geography, to meet the new pastor. This would help your pastor get acquainted with the congregation in small doses. I've known churches

that do this with great success. While attendance won't be 100 per cent, make sure everyone has a chance to participate.

Socializing

Offers of social activities are appreciated, particularly in the early days of a pastorate. I still recall the first Sunday in my first pastorate. It was a town 1,000 miles away from my home and, as a single person, I found myself alone following worship. One moment people were there and the next they were gone. I'm sure that everyone thought someone else would offer to take me to lunch, so no one did. It's certainly not expected every Sunday, but on that first Sunday be gracious and make a good first impression.

Another way to continue this theme is to offer your pastor the tickets you can't use for local events (such as sports, music, and theatre). It's a nice way of saying, "Thanks for all you do." I've served in congregations that do this extremely well, and it's a welcome gesture.

When your pastor takes a vacation, don't say, "Gone again?" Many of us receive four weeks of vacation per year and one or two weeks of continuing-education time. Insist that your pastor actually takes the time and, if someone complains, be among those who show support. Nothing wears away enthusiasm like personal criticism, particularly unwarranted comments about one's work ethic.

The same should be said for taking days off. My contract states that I'm to receive two days off each week. A member of my church likes to check in with me to be sure I'm taking them. Of course, I can't always take two days off, but it's certainly encouraging that someone cares enough to give me a hard time when I don't do so.

Encourage your pastor to be involved in community and/or ecumenical activities. It's absolutely necessary to develop relationships outside the church, particularly as the new pastor in town. Invite your pastor to club meetings, town meetings, and other regular events. Introduce him or her to the mayor. Send a press release to the local newspaper announcing the arrival of your new pastor. If you have relationships with other local churches send them notes announcing his or her arrival. One of my best memories is arriving in Rochester, New York, to find notes from local American Baptist clergy awaiting me with offers of lunch. That felt very good.

Encourage your pastor to be involved in denominational activities. Our denomination hosts a national convention every other year. Encourage his or her participation in these major events as well as various annual meetings and retreats. In addition, be sure there's enough money in the continuing-education fund to cover a reasonable number of events each year.

Family Matters

Keep in mind that you called us, not our families. Our children have a burden on their shoulders if they're expected to be role models for your children. This is unfair. Please allow our children to be children.

Our spouses like to be appreciated for what they bring to the ministry, not as an appendage of the pastor. During the interview process, don't ask if the pastor's spouse can play the piano. Calling a pastor once meant a "two-for-one deal," but it no longer does. Our spouses often have careers of their own, including full-time parenthood. Allow them to bring their gifts to the church. Please don't demand those gifts.

If your pastor is single, do not make it your mission to "get the pastor married." Repeat after me: *I will never set my pastor up on an unannounced blind date.* If you know someone you'd like your pastor to meet, have a party and invite both.

Looking to the Future

Please don't think of your pastor as an employee. I realize that this is complicated. Yes, the church pays the pastor, but your pastor was called by your church to provide leadership - spiritual and otherwise. As hard as we try, we'll not always be available for every need. Expectations that we should be are unreasonable. Remember the children's song, "I am the Church, you are the Church, we are the Church together. All of God's people, all around the world. Yes, we're the Church together." Let's do this together.

Pray for your pastor. At my installation, our area minister encouraged the folks to pray for me daily by putting my picture on the refrigerator door so that every time the door was opened they might lift up a prayer on my behalf. The first time I entered a member's kitchen and found my picture on the refrigerator, it warmed my heart. Do your part by consistently lifting your pastor up in prayer. You can't pray

PLEASE TURN TO NEXT PAGE

enough for your pastor and his/her family.

Treat your pastor as you wish to be treated. If you have something unpleasant to say, do it privately and in a loving spirit. We can be wounded too. When someone says a mean-spirited thing about us or our families, we too can bleed. Please don't complain to our PRC without at least trying to talk to us first. And the PRC should ask if such an attempt has been made before becoming involved in a particular situation. PRC members can offer to go with a person who feels uncomfortable, but the PRC wants to avoid becoming a complaint department.

Be forgiving. Pastors speak at least sixty times a year, preaching at regular services, funerals, weddings, special holiday services, and community events. If you have two services, add about forty-seven more. We will not always be "on." We will make mistakes. Our grammar may slip from time to time. Every sermon will not be what you wanted to hear. But it isn't always about you. It's also about the person sitting next to you. Be kind and forgiving.

This isn't a comprehensive list of "dos and don'ts." Certainly parishioners could write a corresponding list of "dos" and

"don'ts" for pastors. Maybe the Beatles got it right. We do "get by with a little help from our friends." And if we love them well, treating one another as we wish to be treated, success will occur. It will not be without bumps in the road, but the chances of success are much greater when we act in the spirit of love. Remember, your pastor's success is your success.

*See Tom Bandy's May 2002 *Net Results* article, "Build a TRUE Visitation Team! The Easiest Difficult Leverage Point for Traditional Churches." To obtain a digital version of this article, go to www.netresults.org/newdigital.htm.

See page 30 for "Coaching Corner" questions on this article.



These TIPS are adapted by permission from two supporting papers to *Church Sim™ - Overcoming Building Constraints*, a planning, learning, and dreaming church simulation computer program. Parks has been a pastor, church planter, and church consultant, currently serving as Director of Missions of Unity Baptist Association in East Texas. To order the program or for consultations, conferences, or questions, contact him at 936-634-3734 or stephen_parks@compuserve.com.

Your Eight Best Reasons for Starting a New Worship Service

First and foremost, starting an additional service begins with the mission and vision of the pastor and other key leaders to be faithful to the Great Commission. Eight of ten churches that begin a new service will experience a measurable increase in the number of conversions as well as in total worship attendance and giving. If a church has written mission, vision, and/or value statements, then the pastor should begin demonstrating that starting a second service is a reflection of these statements.

There are other good reasons to start a new service, including

1. It may help overcome building constraints.
2. It may be more convenient or the only time that some people can attend.
3. It may provide initiative for members to invite their friends.
4. It may reach new groups of people.
5. It may provide an alternative style that some people in the congregation prefer.
6. It may help reach inactive members.
7. It may help mobilize a larger base of volunteers.

The pastor and leadership should determine which of these reasons, in addition to the Great Commission, are appropriate to help the church understand the need for a new service.

Twelve Questions to Ask Before Your Building Reaches Capacity

Every growing church will eventually be faced with the problem of exceeding its building capacity, which could limit or constrain its growth. Rather than discouraging church leaders, this constraint should be viewed as a window of opportunity. Here are twelve key questions to ask yourself two years before you reach capacity.

1. What happens if we decide to do nothing?
2. Should we build a new building on site to supplement or replace existing space?
3. Should we renovate our current building, creatively adding new space?
4. Should we reallocate and make better use of available space in our current building?
5. Should we deal with "capacity" by helping to plant new churches in our area?
6. Should we become a multicampus church by building another facility at a new site and worshiping in two places?
7. Should we create overflow space and offer people a live simultaneous broadcast of our worship services?
8. Should we change our philosophy of ministry from meeting in buildings to meeting in homes: from large church to cell church?
9. Should we take the step of providing multiple worship services?
10. Should we change attendance patterns by sending members out to work in smaller churches or in the community during peak worship times? They could then come to worship in their own church at a different time.
11. Should we relocate by moving into rented facilities that offer more space and versatility?
12. Should we purchase a new site and build new facilities?

The better drivers on the road are those who look ahead down the highway as far as they can so they have more reaction time. The leaders of growing churches should be especially careful to anticipate constraints or limits to growth and respond ahead of time in order to maintain momentum. Regaining lost momentum is much harder than not losing it in the first place. Church leaders should carefully evaluate each of these options and earnestly seek God's guidance to choose the right option or combination of options to overcome building constraints.