

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: INTERIM SERVICES FOR CHURCHES BETWEEN MINISTERS

Newsletter, December, 2006, #7

Checking References, by Jerrie W. Barber

I received this e-mail following the last newsletter. I am including it with my reply.

Dear Bro. Jerrie,

We have been in touch with a man from _____, ____ who has been preaching ___ years. He has a BA in Bible at _____ and a Masters in _____ from _____

We are impressed with talking with him and perusing his resume and web site.

We are sure his references would give a glowing report. Can you suggest a way that we can dig deeper to more readily assure success in our pulpit?

* * *

My reply:

_____ ,

I have attached a check list I have used for hiring/not hiring secretaries. If I were doing this for a preacher, I would include points that would be important: **PREACHING, GETTING ALONG WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE, ABILITY TO ACCEPT CRITICISM, BIBLE TEACHING, etc.**

When I talk to a reference, I want to listen to that person as they describe the applicant's weak points. My rule is: if they don't know them enough to know weak points, they don't know enough to recommend them or they are hiding something. I don't believe a couple is ready to get married or a church and preacher is ready to work together unless they know—not only what they like about each other—but also what they don't like about each other and how they plan to put up with what they don't like. The last two questions are important:

- Would you hire this person if you had this position available?
- Matthew 7:12 - If I were in your place and you were in mine, what would you want me to tell you?

I would find other people that know the person they have not listed as a reference and check with them.

I recommend a background check and a credit check. A background check will assist in revealing possible sexual and legal problems. A credit check will tell their recent relationship to money. Larry Burkette said, "Money is an outside indication of what is going on on the inside."

When I am being considered for a work, I appreciate and am encouraged when the leaders thoroughly check my references and check with others who know me.

* * *

Berry's Chapel church of Christ
Reference Check List for Secretary

Applicant: _____

Reference: _____

Character

Excellent Average Poor

5 4 3 2 1

Reliability, on time, etc.

Excellent Average Poor

5 4 3 2 1

Initiative

Excellent Average Poor

5 4 3 2 1

Personal Appearance

Excellent Average Poor

5 4 3 2 1

Ability to Plan

Excellent Average Poor

5 4 3 2 1

Personal Relationships

Excellent Average Poor

5 4 3 2 1

Phone Personality

Excellent Average Poor

5 4 3 2 1

Confidentiality

Excellent Average Poor

5 4 3 2 1

What would you consider this person's:

Strong points? _____

Weak points? _____

Would you hire this person if you had this position available? _____

Matthew 7:12 – If I were in your place and you were in mine, what would you want me to tell you?

SHAKESPEARE QUOTATIONS FOR MINISTERS, by John Parker

Never alone

Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

HAMLET 3.3

Any action by an important person affects many others.

Pray can I not,

Though inclination be as sharp as will:

My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;

And, like a man to double business bound,

I stand in pause where I shall first begin,

And both neglect.

HAMLET 3.3

Claudius tries to pray for forgiveness, but knows that he has not repented: therefore he is miserable in between holding on to sin and a desire for forgiveness.

O Hamlet, speak no more:

Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;

And there I see such black and grained spots

As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET 3.4

A powerful and candid speaker/preacher can force a person to see his/her sins for what they are.

Confess yourself to heaven;

Repent what's past; avoid what is to come;
And do not spread the compost on the weeds,
To make them ranker.

HAMLET 3.4

Repent of sins to avoid punishment, and avoid committing more of the same sins.

Smile of the Month

After the young reporter had been repeatedly admonished to cut his stories to the bare essentials, he decided that the editor really meant it; so the next item he turned out read like this: "J. Smith looked up the elevator shaft to see if the car was on its way down. It was. Age, forty-five" (*Lifetime Speaker's Encyclopedia, Volume 1*, edited by Jacob M. Braude, page 405).

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books

Jerrie Barber

Beside the Bible, the most helpful book I have read is *Generation to Generation, Family Process in Church and Synagogue* by Edwin H. Friedman, published by Guilford Press. Most people will not want this book. It is expensive—\$42.24 from Amazon.com. The sentences are long. The words are difficult. Some of the ideas are weird. Yet, has been a beam of light on how to better understand myself and others. I have read it four times and started on the fifth. We have read it twice in staff meetings at Berry's Chapel. We read about three pages a week, taking about two years to complete. Here are some thoughts:

It is the thesis of this book that all clergymen and clergywomen, irrespective of faith, are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: the families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own. Because the emotional process in all of these systems is identical, unresolved issues in any one of them can produce symptoms in the others, and increased understanding of any one creates more effective functioning in all three (page 1).

What is vital to changing any kind of "family" is not knowledge of technique or even of pathology but, rather, the capacity of the family leader to define his or her own goals and values while trying to maintain a nonanxious presence within the system. Also, when it come to change in families, clarity may be more important than empathy (pages 2, 3).

When family members use physical distance to solve problems of emotional interdependency, the result is always temporary, or includes a transference of the problem to another relationship system (page 41).

Family secrets act as the plaque in the arteries of communication; they cause stoppage in the general flow and not just at the point of their existence (pages 52).

Much of the criticism directed at spiritual leaders is henpecking, pure and simple. It can never be made to go away permanently by trying harder to please. Despite the time-bomb quality of the emotionality, it is usually rather harmless in itself and will tend to self-destruct if there is no defensive feedback to keep it ticking (page 207).

As long as we find ourselves able to stay loose about content issues in the congregation, or about the content of charges directed against us, this is a strong suggestions we are doing well.

But if we find ourselves thinking about the members of our congregations in diagnostic categories, that is firm evidence we are not (page 210).

It is never possible to make others responsible by trying to make them responsible, because the very act of trying to make others responsible is preempting their responsibility (page 211).

Barber Clippings

During the past month, Gail and I have continued to visit families at Berry's Chapel, preparing for our leaving. Our people are very gracious and encouraging. It is occurring to me that the end is coming. I have only one more month of sermons to plan. We stay two months ahead. The worship committee met Monday night to plan worship for February. Only March and one Sunday in April remains.

I led a workshop with a congregation in the area this past month.

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In December I am speaking on Wednesday nights at the Granny White church in Nashville on the topic "Why the Word Became Flesh" based on Milligan's treatment of that subject in his book THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION. I will be preaching for the South Harpeth church the last two Sundays of this month. Please see my website for my work on interim ministry at www.interimcofc.com.

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