

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

Newsletter, May, 2007, #11

How Should We Treat the New Preachers? Matthew 7:12; Ecclesiastes 7:10

(In three newsletters, I am including my notes from a sermon I preached at Berry's Chapel, March 11, 2007. I hope the thoughts helped the Berry's Chapel congregation, Wes Gallagher, Andy Baker, and will help others who might profit from these ideas. I appreciate many preachers who responded to my e-mail invitation to participate in this.)
Jerrie W. Barber

Introduction:

- A. When a new preacher comes to a congregation, it is a time of transition.
- B. It is often difficult to accept the new person without unfavorable comparisons to the previous preacher.
- C. This is true in marriage.
 - 1. Gayle Napier, "If you have been divorced and decide you could, should, and want to get married again, you probably should wait at least two years or you will have more people in the bed than you can sleep with."
 - 2. Often true of second marriages, regardless of the reason.
 - 3. In the heat of his best sermon, "We're all sinners before God," the preacher swept his hand slowly over the congregation and commanded in a quavering voice, "Let any man or woman among us who can claim perfection rise!" To his utter astonishment, a middle-aged man in the last pew rose. The congregation gasped. The minister leaned over the podium with a stern, piercing look. "Surely, sir, surely you don't consider yourself perfect," he sputtered. "No, no, of course not," said the man. "I'm standing in proxy for my wife's first husband."
- D. An Intentional Interim Minister is needed if a church finds itself in one or more of the following situations:
 - 1. The minister served seven or more years before leaving,
 - 2. The minister resigned under pressure (a forced termination),
 - 3. The minister's resignation was requested due to ethical or moral misconduct,
 - 4. The minister departed in the midst of severe conflict within the church,
 - 5. The church has not conducted a self-study of its structure, history, priorities, mission or vision in the last 5 years, or
 - 6. The church has a pattern of the last 2 ministers leaving after having served the church for only 2-3 years (Ronald G. Brown, <http://www.montroseministries.org/Interm.pdf>).
- E. Maybe by talking about it we can improve the relationship of Berry's Chapel and the new preachers: Wes Gallagher and Andy Baker.

F. I will give you my points, illustrated by many e-mails I received from preachers I asked to help with this lesson.

I. TREAT THE NEW PREACHERS LIKE YOU HAVE TREATED ME.

A. I have had nearly fourteen years of pleasant ministry. You have treated me and my family well.

B. Three things I think of that you have done well:

1. Communication. Matthew 7:7,8

a. When I came, I told you I had in the past had people not to tell me what they needed and I didn't do what they wanted because I didn't know about it. Some would later want me to feel guilty.

b. I told you I hoped you didn't do that, but if you did, I wouldn't cooperate.

c. Please tell me what you need.

d. You have done that well.

(1) Sick, hospital room.

(2) Sick, no visitors.

(3) Sick, not visitors, but we would appreciate the elders and preachers dropping by.

(4) Sick, no visitors, no announcements in bulletin or on Newline. If elders and preachers want to visit, that would be OK.

e. There have been times when friends have called telling us to visit, put names in the bulletin when the family had instructed otherwise. We have followed the family's instructions.

2. If you treat your next preachers like me, you will have to treat them different from me.

a. You have not required me to be like Glen Randolph, Terry Jones, or any other preacher.

b. Thank you.

c. I could not have done that.

d. Your next preachers may not be runners, bike riders, ventriloquists, or tell you children they are powerful.

e. But they will have great things to contribute.

f. Let them be themselves.

3. You have encouraged me.

a. Words. Ephesians 4:29

b. Letters.

c. Concern.

d. Compassion. Galatians 6:2

(1) During a difficult time in 1994, Charlie Washam came by often, stepped into the upper room and asked, "How is _____ doing?"

(2) The next question, "How are you doing?"

e. Meals.

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

He's fat, and scant of breath.

HAMLET 5.2.

He's out of training and short of breath.

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

HAMLET 5.2.

Hamlet asks Horatio to defer leaving the world by suicide so that he will be able to tell others in the world what truly happened to his friend Hamlet.

Good night, sweet prince;
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

HAMLET 5.2

Horatio's words to Hamlet as Hamlet dies. These words or a slight modification of them may be used to close a funeral eulogy for an especially dear and respected person.

These quotations mark the end of my suggested quotations from Shakespeare's HAMLET. I will begin quotations from another of his plays next month.

Smile of the Month

“Little Claude’s mother had reluctantly allowed her precious child to attend public school. She gave the teacher a long list of instructions. ‘My Claude is so sensitive,’ she explained, ‘don’t ever punish him. Just slap the boy next to him. That will frighten Claude’ ” (*Wish I’d Said That*, by Cleon Lyles, page 103).

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

To Dream Again: How to Help Your Church Come Alive, by Robert D. Dale, Broadman Press, Nashville, Tennessee, © 1981.

“There are four ways to revitalize a church, organizationally speaking. The easiest is policy change. You simply adjust the way you do things.

“A second strategy is to change personnel. Firing the minister or electing new lay leaders is a common approach.

“Another change tactic is to create new program structures. Reorganization plans are familiar in institutions of all kinds.

“Change policy. Change people. Change programs. Each of these approaches has its advocates. But the approach I suggest is the most basic of all—clarify purpose. “The fourth way to revitalize a church is to define and act on its fundamental purpose. A new dream awakes a congregation. A poster motto challenges: ‘Aim for the sun. You may not reach it, but you will fly higher than if you never aimed at all’ ” (Foreward).

“In *Winnie-the Pooh*, Pooh and Piglet take an evening walk. For along time they walk in companionable silence.

“Finally, Piglet breaks the silence and asks, ‘When you wake up in the morning, Pooh, what’s the first thing you say to yourself?’

“ ‘What’s for breakfast?’ answers Pooh. ‘And what do you say, Piglet?’

“ ‘I say, I wonder what exciting thing is going to happen today?’ ” (page 12).

“A ‘shorthand’ way of describing a healthy church, organizationally speaking, is that it *plans*. An unhealthy church *solves problems*.”

“Also, a healthy church is . . .

- Proactive and takes initiative for its ministry,
- builds on and is renewed by its dream, and
- ministers to others.

“On the other hand, an unhealthy church is . . .

- reactive and surrenders its initiative for ministry,
- declines and doubts itself to death, and
- must itself be ministered to” (page 16).

“Stakeholders feel a personal involvement in, responsibility for, and loyalty to their church that goes beyond assigned or delegated tasks. A decline in participation or financial support, low morale, staffing difficulties, communication gaps, and poor planning are marks of a lack of stakeholding in a church or volunteer organization” (page 66).

“Norms are different than standards. Standards are what we say will happen; norms are what actually happens. Standards are customarily formal goals; norms are informal, but real, goals. Conflict flares when standards and norms become visibly dissimilar” (page 92).

“A phenomenon of change, nostalgia afflicts mobile societies and organizations in transition. Nostalgia is experienced by persons ‘who do not like where they have arrived and have no taste for the next destination.’

“Nostalgia in an organizational setting is the feeling of being caught betwixt and between. The future threatens; the past seems familiar and attractive; the present is uncertain enough to cause tentativeness. Congregations get mired down between their glory age and future shock. It’s a frustrating time for organizational leaders to cope with” (page 107).

“Stable congregations have more frequent, but smaller conflicts. Healthy congregations recognize that differences enrich them. But where the ‘lid is kept on,’ pressure builds up and major decisions become battlegrounds. Polarization often occurs when only one major conflict is brewing and the members have suppressed conflict in the past. They, therefore, have little experience in dealing with conflict, and the church may lack a forum where different views can be explored openly. Stable congregations deal with their differences as they occur” (page 122).

“One mark of an unhealthy congregation is a few persons carrying too heavy a load of organizational work. They quickly become candidates for religious burn-out” (page 123).

Barber Clippings, Jerrie Barber

We have arrived in Eddyville, Kentucky, and started our ministry here. The first Sunday was Family and Friends Day. We had good attendance at the services. The members of the congregation prepared well for our coming. The church owns a house for the preacher next door to the church building on 208 Fairview Avenue. They furnished it throughout: couches, table chairs, dishes, silverware, TV, curtains. We brought clothes, computers, and a new “interim bed.” Although we don’t want to move furniture every six to eighteen months, we decided we wanted to sleep on the same bed were ever we went.

I am teaching young adults on Sunday morning, the auditorium class on *Actsion* in the Book of Acts on Wednesday night, preaching at Sunday and Sunday night services. I am scheduled to begin my participation in a weekly radio program Sunday. Gail and I are visiting all the families in the congregation, asking: “What are the strengths of this congregation? What would you like to see improved in this congregation? How can I help while I am here?” We are being received well. In the next few weeks, we plan to start a class, *Learning to Love my Friend(s)*. This will be for elders, deacons, preachers, and spouses. We will be studying and trying to follow Jesus’ way of relating to people. This will be held on a week night in the homes of the participants.

Later, we plan a class for training present and future elders and deacons and a men’s training class.

I am scheduled to be in a meeting at the Beardstown church of Christ, near Linden, Tennessee, May 20-23. If you are in the area, I would be glad to see you.

Contact information for us in Eddyville, Kentucky:

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Church phone: 270-388-7948

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Both phones ring in our house. We also check our home phone each day.

I have limited time available for leadership workshops, retreats, or other special events that do not involve a Sunday. I have one more Sunday available for 2007.

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This summer I am working on writing projects. I plan to travel to England and also to a symposium on A Cappella singing at Pepperdine University in June. I am available as well for interim ministry appointments.

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