

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

Newsletter, June, 2007, #12
by Jerrie Barber and John Parker

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

- I. TREAT THE NEW PREACHERS LIKE YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED. Matthew 7:12
 - A. What do you need when you are in a new position, confused, disoriented, maybe questioning whether you should have made this move or not?
 - B. How do you like to be compared with someone else?
 1. I have been discouraged by those who—in years gone by—continued to tell me about preachers who were much better than I.
 2. I become uncomfortable and suspicious of those who have continually told me how much better I am than previous preachers. At first I believed some of the people. The longer I stayed at each place, the more I respected, appreciated, and/or had compassion for my predecessors.
- II. TREAT YOUR NEW PREACHERS LIKE YOU WOULD TREAT JESUS IF HE WERE THE NEXT PREACHER AT BERRY'S CHAPEL.
 - A. Someone said, "Don't suggest that. They crucified Him."
 - B. But not everyone did.
 - C. There were those who loved Him and helped Him.
 - D. In effect, we are treating Jesus as we treat others. Matthew 25:34-40
- III. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FROM PLENTY OF PREACHERS.
 - A. Article written by a preacher to the congregation where he had served several years:
 1. Realize that each minister and his family will have their own talents and interests. Allow them to be themselves and resist the temptation, however natural, to make comparison or expect him to do things a "certain way", especially based on past ministers.
 2. Resist the temptation to quickly get him "on board" with your particular desires for the church, or to have him immediately "line

up” with you on some church issue. Let his view of the congregation and his decisions on where to act initially come from the elders of the church.

3. “Adopt” his family quickly. Take them out for Sunday lunch. Encourage him. Show hospitality.
 4. Expect him to preach the Word, and, when he does, do not assume it was meant only for your personal situation. Remember, even if it fits, it may have been just what the Lord wanted you to see, and was probably done with your best interest in mind. Consider the things said according to how they match with scripture, and resist the temptation to allow emotions to determine your perception. Do not be looking for his mistakes. Of course he’ll make them, as he’s human.
 5. Pray continuously for the strength and growth of the church here.
- B. From preachers who have had a difficult time following long ministries.
1. Realistic Expectations.
 2. Let him be his own man with his own style and way of doing things.
 3. Encourage the flock to invite the new guy to their homes for coffee, pie, or a meal.
 4. Welcome his wife not as “the preacher’s wife”, but as a new member to the flock with her own needs and gifts.
 5. Pray for him and with him.
 6. Lots of encouragement.
 7. Let him pick his own Secretary.
 - a. I’ve spent a lot of time “fussing” with secretaries from the previous administration who said, “HE (the old preacher) did it this way.”
 8. Let him know you appreciate him – Often.
 9. If he says something that can be taken two ways, assume he meant it in the best possible way.
 10. If he says, does, or writes something you don’t like or don’t understand go to HIM FIRST and not the elders. Give him a chance to clarify or explain what he said, did, or wrote.
 11. I can’t live up to the legend. I am not sure how he made 20 visits a day, wrote 25 cards of encouragement, prepared all of his lessons, wrote books, built buildings, etc. He worked 12 hours a day 7 days a week. You get the picture. I guess again it gets back to realistic expectations.
 12. When a preacher publicly addresses a difficult subject (in a sermon), I’d encourage the eldership to follow the lesson with a few words of support. “The truth was spoken here today. The eldership endorses this message” or words to that effect. **I not good at being alone.** Folks in the pew need a model for how to respond to sermons. I hear a lot of criticism, but little (if any)

- public endorsement when the hard subjects are talked about. **I'm not Nathan or John the Baptist.**
13. Don't assume the preacher knows what is happening. I've missed a funeral and numerous hospital visits because folks never called or told me about what was happening. **I'm not omniscient.** "Is anyone among you sick, let him CALL . . ."
 14. Realize that to be an effective preacher, I must be an ardent student. Good study takes a lot of time. **I'm not inspired.**
 15. I wonder how Israel felt about Joshua after Moses had died? "I liked the old preacher better . . ." Folks mourned a long time after Moses died. My experience has been that people tend to mourn the moving (i.e., passing) of the old preacher, and then mourn over the fact that the new man is not like the old one. **I get tired of competing with a ghost.**
 16. I've never had a successful work after immediately following a preacher with a long tenure. (I'm told the average "stay" after following someone who's been with a congregation for a long time is *less than three years*). **I'm not a clone.**
 17. I'd encourage the church to allow the new preacher to hire new staff. I've spent a lot of time "fussing" with secretaries from the previous administration who said, "HE (the old preacher) did it this way." When George Bush went into office, he didn't keep Bill Clinton's staff.
 18. Realize (but don't sanction) that the preacher will occasionally make poor decisions *in terms of wisdom*. There's a difference between choosing to do wrong and making a decision based upon the available information at the time. **I'm not Solomon.** . . . and Solomon made some bad choices during his preaching career. I'm not asking for a license to be immature, I'm just saying I usually learn to do things differently after I've done them poorly.
 19. Preaching is like fishing. Great fisherman take years to learn how to catch fish in all weather/seasons. I'm better at fishing today than I was when I was a small boy, but I'm trying to do better every time I get in the boat. I hope I'm a decent preacher today, but if you'll be patient with me, I'll get better at it as time passes. **I'm not done learning** – in either study or delivery.
 20. If you're disappointed in my behavior (and sooner or later you will be); if I've actually sinned against you, please come and talk to me. I can't repent unless and until you come to me (Matt. 5; 18). I can't deal with a whole congregation of folks who are upset at something I've allegedly done. **I can't fight a hundred Philistines at one time.** It's not fair to "gang up" on anybody, including and especially the preacher. "Go and tell him his fault between you and him ALONE . . ."
-

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

For slander lives upon succession,
For ever hous'd where it gets possession.
COMEDY OF ERRORS 3.1
Slander thrives by one slander leading to another.

The venom clamors of a jealous woman
Poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth.
COMEDY OF ERRORS 5.1

Sweet recreation barr'd, what doth ensue
But moody and dull melancholy.
COMEDY OF ERRORS
Recreation is essential to avoid depression.

In food, in sport, and life-preserving rest
To be disturb'd, would mad or man or beast.
COMEDY OF ERRORS 5.1
Depriving food, recreation, and rest will make one insane.

No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en.
THE TAMING OF THE SHREW 1.1

Smile of the Month

“People are composed of girls and boys, also men and women. Boys are no good at all until they grow up and get married. Men who don't get married are no good either. Boys are an awful bother. They want everything they see except soap. My mom is a woman and my dad is a man. A woman is a grow-up girl with children. My dad is such a nice man that I think he must have been a girl when he was a boy (written by a little girl; *Wish I'd Said That*, by Cleon Lyles, page 91).

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

Beginning Ministry Together, by Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath, Ann W. Heath;
copyright © 2003, by the Alban Institute.

“In the seminar ‘Finishing Strong, Ending Well,’ which is geared to clergy who served a congregation for 10 years or more, we advise having the pastor announce his or her intention to retire four to five years ahead of time. This allows both pastor and the congregation to do some strategic planning for what important goals the congregation wants this pastor to complete before leaving. We often recommend the pastor have a three-month sabbatical to prepare for these last four or five years so the pastorate “finishes strong.” Time should be built in to ‘end well,’ such as setting aside the last six months of the pastorate for closure. But in every circumstance, it is always important for

the congregation to say farewell and to end the pastoral relationship in such a way that both are prepared and enabled to move on to new relationships and opportunities (page 11).

“Further, the committee should take the time to debrief at the end of every meeting, so that concerns about the group’s workings are shared regularly. Such debriefing can be as simple as asking each member to offer a word or phrase indicating what they are taking home with them from the meeting, or to describe how pleased they are with the way they worked together at the meeting. Note that a debriefing is not a time for debate, but rather for each member to make observations about the group’s process skills. These observations can help the chair or facilitator to take note of issues or practices that detract from the group’s functioning and to help the group figure out how to make future meetings more productive (page 25).

“We cannot escape the fact that a congregation is also a political community. Every community of three or more is in some sense a political entity. Someone will need to lead, and others will need to follow, even though the leader/follower roles may shift from member to member at different times. Power and authority issues are particularly relevant when all the followers cannot obtain everything they want in a particular decision and some compromise needs to be struck. Congregational leaders at this point may be tempted to avoid facing the conflict between members’ needs and wants, refusing to lead until it is ‘safe’ to do so. What is required, however, is for parish leaders to offer the leadership necessary to help members face their differences, which requires that leaders come to terms with power and authority issues (page 132).

“Congregations renew their life and mission by returning to issues typical of the formation period. (Who are we? What are we here for? Who is our neighbor?) Some congregations wait longer than others before the grapple seriously with those questions (page 142).

“If the new pastor has the skills, information, and political support to raise the formation questions again effectively, a new era of vitality might ensure. More typically, the forces driving the decline—internal dysfunction, external change or both—will be ignored until things get worse. In that case, the new pastor will experience (and often collude with) the congregation’s two most destructive illusions: the fantasy that growth can occur without change, and the fantasy that change can occur without conflict” (page 143).

Barber Clippings

Jerrie Barber

Gail and I continue to enjoy our work with the church here in Eddyville, Kentucky. We have visited nearly one-half of the families in the congregation.

Gail starts a ladies’ Bible class next Tuesday morning.

We plan to begin a home Bible study on Jesus as a friend and model leader with the elders, deacons, and wives, Tuesday, June 26. I am considering posting the outlines of those classes on a blog. Please let me know if this would be helpful.

Our Vacation Bible School is July 9-11.

I have a meeting with the Dorris Chapel congregation near Trenton, Tennessee, July 22-25. I would be glad to see you if you are in the area.

barberclippings@comcast.net

www.barberclippings.com

(615) 356-8371

P. O. Box 630

Eddyville, Kentucky 42038

Church phone: 270-388-7948

Home phone: 270-388-8278

June 4-8 Jill and I are attending a symposium on a cappella sacred music at Pepperdine University. Scholars and musicians from around the world who practice a cappella singing will attend for lecture and performance.

June 19-20 I will travel in Britain with photographer Dr. Paul Seawright, a member of the church in Ireland and dean of the college of photography at the University of Ulster. We will continue our visits to sites associated with the great hymns of Britain in preparation for a book proposal.

John H. Parker

Johnparker22@aol.com

www.interimcofc.com

(615) 373-4462