

# WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

June, 2008, #24



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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## Checking References on a Prospective Preacher – or What Do You Not Like and How Will You Put Up With It?

by Jerrie Barber

One of the questions I enjoy asking in pre-marital counseling: “What is it about you future wife/husband

1. that irritates you
2. that you don’t like
3. you think you will be able to change
4. but you won’t
5. and how will you put up with it?”



Then we have a discussion about loooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooong-suffering. Longsuffering means suffering a long time.

I don’t believe a couple is ready to get married until they know – both what they like AND what they don’t like about each other and how they will put up with it. I also think the same principle is true of a preacher and a congregation.

We get married, move to a new congregation because of what we like – the perfection we perceive in the new partner. People get a divorce, fire the preacher, move looking for greener pastures, because of what they don’t like.

Some of this should come out in the interview process. If everyone is looking for the truth – not just a preacher or a job – we will be able to share our strengths and weaknesses. We can then talk about how and if we can live with our differences.

Another way to get to that part of the truth – and to check the information you have already received – is through checking references. Usually a prospective preacher is asked for references.

It is my experience and observation that references are not often checked. “Anybody can find three people who will say good things about them.” And when they are checked it is often done poorly. I receive several calls a year from people wanting to know about someone interested in a position in a church or business. Often the question is, “What can you tell me about this person,” with little or no follow-up.

In my opinion, the minimum should be a detailed time of questioning the references listed with at least three more references that the person did not list. I like a guideline: [Preacher Reference Form](#) . This helps my thinking and gives uniformity when more than one person is checking references. I adapted this one from the *Minister Transition Packet* prepared by Dr. Charles Siburt. I recommend that churches and preachers considering transition get a copy of this book assembled in a 3-ring binder and read it from cover to cover. It is the wisdom and forms from many books, congregations, and individuals and contains ideas that will help discern how to handle a change. You can get it by contacting Dr. Charles Siburt, Abilene Christian University, Box 29405, Abilene, Texas 79699-9405, phone: (325) 674-3732; e-mail: [charles.siburt@acu.edu](mailto:charles.siburt@acu.edu) .

Churches can prevent much heartache by doing adequate checking of references, background check, and credit check. A man with nothing to hide will not mind. Jesus said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

I want to listen to the person’s strengths. I have noticed some. That’s the reason I am following up. I want to hear about his weaknesses. If the reference doesn’t know or tell at least one weakness, I discount the reference. He may not know the person well enough to know his weaknesses. He may not want to tell. I want to know to determine if we can live with what we don’t like about each other.

One of the questions that has been very productive for me in checking references is the Golden Rule question: Matthew 7:12 – If I were in your place and you were in mine, what would you want me to tell you?

Next month, I plan to discuss preachers checking references of churches.

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## Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

### AS YOU LIKE IT

The little strength that I have, I would it were with you.  
[A wish to send to someone a person would like to help]  
AS YOU LIKE IT 1.2



Hereafter, in a better world than this,  
I shall desire more love and knowledge of you.  
[A wish to be with someone at a later and more propitious time, including heaven]  
AS YOU LIKE IT 1.2

Let me the knowledge of my fault bear with me.  
[A request to be informed of what someone considers one's fault]  
AS YOU LIKE IT 1.2

Never so much as in a thought unborn  
Did I offend [you].  
[An affirmation that one has never even thought harm to another]  
AS YOU LIKE IT 1.2

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## Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

*How to Retire Happy, Wild, and Free*, by Ernie J. Zelinski, Copyright © 2007 by Ernie J. Zelinski.



Similarly, for every twenty books written on retirement, there may be only one that has any worthwhile treatment of the important personal issues. The result is that many people spend forty years building an impressive retirement nest egg, but no time at all thinking about how they are going to enjoy retirement. Indeed the biggest mistake you can make with your retirement planning is to concentrate only on the financial aspects (page 2).

The best time to think about your retirement is before your boss does (page 7).

A recent study by researchers David Evans and Terry Lynn Gall concluded that although most Canadian workers viewed retirement as a positive step, only about a third looked forward to it and adjusted well. In fact, 16 percent of those interviewed saw nothing good about it.

“We are a society not only obsessed with looks and youth, but also hard work ethics,” declared Marian Marzynski, the producer of the PBS documentary film *My Retirement Dreams*. “For those who never slowed down from work, the idea of retirement can be frightening; they don’t know what to do after” (page 11).

Liberty is being free from the things we don’t like in order to be slaves of the things we do like (page 34).

Hammond Stith, sixty-one at the time, concluded that there are seven constructive things that retirees can do with their time. “You can work and you can play and you can sleep. You can improve your mind or you can improve your health. You can work in civic activities or educational activities, or you can work in some spiritual area for the church. As far as I know, there’s nothing else you can do...And my retirement has been great. It’s better than anything I ever expected it to be” (page 93).

If you want to be fit and trim throughout your life, you are going to have to work at it and work at the right things. It’s wise to eat healthy foods, but this must be done in

moderation. No matter how well you eat, exercise is required for fitness. Not only is exercise required, it is vigorous exercise that makes the difference.

To be sure, everyone wants to be fit and trim; unfortunately, not very many people want to pay the price. With so many benefits to be reaped from regular exercise, it's a mystery to health professionals why more people aren't physically active. The correlation between healthy people and regular physical exercise is irrefutable, yet less than 10 percent of American adults exercise vigorously at least three times a week (page 120).

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## Smile of the Month

A man and his wife were having some problems at home and were giving each other the silent treatment.

Late in the week the man realized that he would need his wife to wake him at 5:00 a.m. for an early morning business flight to Chicago.

Not wanting to be the first to break the silence AND LOSE, he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5:00 a.m."

The next morning the man woke up, only to discover it was 9:00 a.m. and that he had missed his flight.

Furious, he was about to go and see why his wife hadn't woken him when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed. The paper said, "It is 5:00 a.m. Wake up."

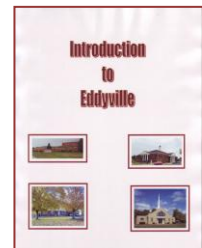
Men are not equipped for these kinds of contests.

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## Barber Clippings

One project during the interim has been *Introduction to Eddyville*. Several of the members worked on compiling a book to describe the church and community. Would this be a community where a preacher would like to live and raise a family? Would you fit here? There is information on history of Lyon County, Eddyville, Kuttawa, Eddyville church of Christ, schools, recreation, medical facilities, attendance and contribution averages for forty-eight years, reviews about the community and church containing a 1-5 star rating with pros and cons, and a self-study. It is part of the process: do you know what you don't like as well as what you like and will you be willing to live with it?



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John Parker

John and Jill have been travelling to Israel recently.

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