

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

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Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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## How to Establish Trust, by Jerrie Barber

Several years ago, I was new in a congregation. I noticed a young man asking different people to borrow a dollar. Most people gave him a dollar. I observed this for several weeks.

One day this young man asked, "Brother Barber, could I borrow a dollar?"

I replied, "Why do you need it and when will you pay me back?"

When he answered those questions, I told him I had to sign notes when I borrowed money. He was willing. I wrote the details on two 3" x 5" cards – date, amount, 0% interest, and due date. We both signed both copies.

He paid me on the agreed date. I signed his note: "Paid in Full," and dated it.

Several weeks later, he asked to borrow \$5.00. After satisfactorily answering the questions of why and when, I loaned him the money. He paid me back at the specified time.

After some time, he asked to borrow \$10.00. With the same procedure, I loaned him the money. However, the Wednesday night before the due date the following Sunday, he came to me with a distressed look on his face. "Brother Barber, I don't know what to do. I've promised to pay you Sunday and I can't do it. What can I do?"



“You have done the most responsible thing you can do. You told me before the money was due. When can you pay me?”

He answered, “A week from Sunday.”

I explained, “All we have to do is change the due date.” I changed the date on both cards.

He paid on the adjusted due date.

Several months went by. He asked this time, “May I borrow \$20.00?”

After asking “Why” and “When,” I loaned him the money without any worry or doubt.

Why?

He had been responsible with less. He had showed me what he would do when things didn’t work out the way he had hoped. “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10, NKJV).

That is my model for developing trust with any person or group. In the beginning, I give only what I can afford to loose. If that works well, I give more. I like to be aware of what happens when things don’t work as planned. I want to watch and learn. What is really happening? Is there consistency? What is the basis for trust? “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

This is the way to develop trust, or to be aware of distrust – depending on the evidence. It is not a service to me or others to give what I can’t afford to loose or to cast my “pearls before lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces” (Matthew 7:6).

On the other hand, it is good to be able “to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

This process of developing and evaluating confidence is helpful in courtship, in considering a preacher or a church, in potential friendship, or in business.

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## Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

All of these are from AS YOU LIKE IT 1.2.

The little strength that I have, I would it were with you.

[A wish for someone’s success in a hard endeavor]

My pride fell with my fortunes;

I’ll ask him what he would.

[I cannot afford any longer to be proud]

What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?

I cannot speak to her, yet she urged conference.

[What emotion is keeping me from speaking?]

[A realization that a person needs to say something but is restrained by feeling]



Hereafter, in a better world than this,  
I shall desire more love and knowledge of you.  
[When we are in a better place (in this world or the next) I will enjoy being with you]

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## Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

*Ten Commandments for Pastors Leaving a Congregation*, by  
Lawrence W. Farris, © 2006 Lawrence W. Farris



It is not as rare as one might think, or hope, that congregations sometimes call similar pastors (sometimes even in physical appearance!) time after time. And no one should be surprised that the same congregational problems keep arising pastor after pastor in such circumstances. Likewise, some pastors keep finding themselves in congregations with similar types of problems. And they should not be surprised at the commonality they keep seeking out at some preconscious level. When scripture says that the sins of the fathers and mothers are visited upon successive generations (Exodus 20:5), it's not just because God is jealous. It's because people often choose not to learn from their mistakes and thereby keep repeating the same patterns of brokenness. What the popular definition of insanity? Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Without seeking good partings, both pastors and congregations can be prone to repeating previous mistakes (pages xii, xiii).

There are several benefits of such intentional effort at reconciliation. At the rudimentary level, no one, neither pastor nor parishioner, enjoys going through life nagged by what-ifs of unresolved conflicts. Even where the brokenness cannot be fully mended, no matter how good the intentions to do so, the effort made affords a sense of closure that allows easier movement into the future.

For parishioners, it can be a blessing to know that they have been heard and that some, if not all, of their contributions to the faith community's life have been valued by the pastor. If this appreciation is not given and received, the parishioner may well project the unresolved feelings onto all pastors generally, and onto the next pastor specifically. In other words, unresolved conflict with one pastor may be transferred to another (pages 48, 49).

Here are two questions for the departing pastor to ponder: What do you know now that you wish you had known when you started the pastorate you are now leaving? As an act of gracious collegiality and Christian fellowship, why not share this information with your successor (page 53)?

Out his experience in moving with children, a pastor colleague of Naomi's gave her some wish counsel concerning her children: that she make sure not to tell them that the move was something God had decided and about which she had no choice. This sort of buck-passing evasion of both responsibility and accountability could dramatically

impact the children's faith, in the short and the long term, if they were to transfer frustrations with their mother onto God. The "God made me do it: explanation does not speak well of either God or the pastor! Instead, the pastor should share how he or she is seeking to be faithful to God's leading, acknowledging how this can hurt loved ones but hopefully can open the possibility for growing in faith through the experience (page 68).

It is sometimes said that the inability to change the past is one of the limitation that God shares with us. The best we can do when it comes to leaving a congregation is to bring the past to as complete and whole a conclusion as possible, so that all may rejoice in what has been good, learn from what has not, and move freely and faithfully forward into a promising future where God may be praised and served (page 91).

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## Smile of the Month

Steve's mother dashed into the nursery when she heard him screaming. His baby sister was pulling his hair.

She comforted him and said, "Your baby sister doesn't know that it hurts when she pulls your hair."

A couple of minutes later, she heard the baby screaming. She ran back into the room and said, "What's wrong with the baby?"

"Nothing much," replied Steve. "Only now she knows."  
*Jokes, Jokes, Jokes*, by Jeannette Fidell, page 9



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## Barber Clippings

Our time at Eddyville came to a close Sunday night, August 10. Jeff Finch will preach his first sermon as their regular preacher this Sunday, August 15. Jeff grew up in the Washington Avenue congregation in Evansville, Indiana. He speaks highly of and with great appreciation for his family, preacher, youth minister, and church.

The elders and congregation at Eddyville were cooperative and encouraging to me and Gail in our first interim. They provided a comfortable house with furniture for our stay there. They participated in training classes, self-study, and evaluation. They listened to suggestions I gave of ways to do the Lord's work. They used what they thought was helpful. They deleted or placed in the recycle bin what was not what they thought best at the time.

I am thankful to God and them for this opportunity.

Gail and I look forward to our work in Hendersonville, Tennessee. I start work with them on a part-time basis October 1. I will be working with the staff and training different members for interim tasks. I will be studying churches and preachers who have made good transitions and those who have not done as well – especially where the preacher has stayed on staff in a different role. If you have any information on that, please contact me. I am eager to learn.

I will be available for some Sunday appointments during the fall. I will not begin preaching at Hendersonville until January 2009.

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John Parker

I continue to work on my upcoming book on great British hymns with photographer Paul Seawright, due to be published next spring. I am also developing a Powerpoint presentation on the scheme of redemption that will incorporate scripture and commentary and corresponding supplemental material including images of great paintings with Biblical scenes, great Christian hymns, and photographs from my recent trip to Israel. A picture of the Sea of Galilee appears below. I will use this material in my classes at Lipscomb University this fall and also offer it to churches.



On August 10 I spoke at the Wolf Creek Church of Christ as part of their fall gospel meeting series.

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