

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

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Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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What Do You Do When they Don't Call Tuesday at 7:00 p.m.?

by Jerrie Barber

Last month I discussed one of the most disappointing and frustrating things in the search process for me as a preacher: a promise to call with information on the search committee's progress or of the elders' deliberation, usually preceded with, "We'll let you know something next Tuesday night at 7:00: [March 2009 Newsletter](#) , followed by nothing.



One year at the Eldership Retreat ([EldersConnect 2009](#)) at Faulkner University, I was exhorting elders to communicate with prospective preachers – especially when you say you will.

David Short, then director of Faulkner development and an elder of the University congregation, taught me a good lesson. He said, "Jerrie, we experience the same thing in raising money for the school. We present the opportunity to help Faulkner. The person needs some time to think about it and promises to call at a certain time. I also note it in my planner and confirm the date and time. Then I add, 'I'll look forward to hearing from you next Tuesday night at 7:00 p.m. And if you are not able to call at that time, I'll check with you a day or two after that.' That gives me permission to renew the conversation."

Thank you, David Short! That is an application of a principle that I have long believed and taught: I am 100% responsible for my communication.

As I have reflected on that valuable suggestion, I wonder if I had not done that for the same reason that many have not called. Most people don't like to give and receive unpleasant news. And most of the news in the search process is not favorable – unless the church is considering only one preacher and the preacher is only talking to one congregation and they both could not envision any other being as good as the one now being considered.

I would guess that most elders or search committee members don't enjoy delivering the message, "We have decided to look elsewhere." I know that is not the most encouraging news for a preacher with three weeks to go on a ninety-day agreement.

Therefore what I need to do as the preacher wanting to know what is happening is complete the conversation. Make the call. Ask for the information I want. Minutes are free on my cell after 9:00 p.m. and on weekends.

If they are still considering me or if I am the preacher they want, I learn that and the call probably will not change that. If I am no longer being considered, I learn that and I am free from thinking about that possibility any longer. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32, NKJV).

Observation of the Month

by John Parker

Recently a member of the wealthy Cobbe family visited an exhibit of portraits of Shakespeare in the London's National Portrait Gallery. He recognized that one portrait was a copy of a portrait of a Renaissance man that had been in his family's art collection for many years. Until that moment none of the family recognized that the man in the portrait was probably Shakespeare. If it is, it is the only known existing portrait of the playwright that was painted during his lifetime. Many of us have possessed treasures for a long time without fully recognizing them or maybe without recognizing them at all. Psalm 119:105 tells us "Thy word is a lamp to my feet,/And a light to my path." Yet many people have the Word in their homes and never benefit from the lamp and the light. Martha failed to recognize that only one thing was really necessary, the word of Christ (Lk. 10:38-42). Let's recognize the treasures that we have and encourage others to do so.



Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

Your If is the only peacemaker; much virtue in If.

AS YOU LIKE IT 5.4

Many statements can be and are qualified by "If" such as in "If I have time I'll start going to church."

The Duke hath put on a religious life
And thrown into neglect the pompous court.



AS YOU LIKE IT 5.4

That would be a good plan for many addicted to the world

Out of these convertites

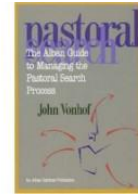
There is much matter to be heard and learn'd.

AS YOU LIKE IT 5.4

Converts can tell many and important lessons.

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

Pastoral Search, by John Vonnof, Copyright © 1999 by The Alban Institute, Inc.



You need to be competitive and thorough in your efforts. You may not think that the words *competitive* or *compete* are appropriate when talking about the pastoral search process, yet consider that when one church becomes vacant, it simply becomes one more in a large circle of vacant churches. Each of these congregations is working to find a pastor with the right ministry skills to best match its gifts and needs. Each is using the best resources it can develop to present its church in the best light possible. Several may ultimately issue calls to the same pastor. Whether or not you like the words, the process is competitive and churches do compete for pastors. Search committees do not need to focus on this aspect of the process, but they should be aware of it. Each church enters into the search process with its own unique set of strengths and needs, and the pastors it considers have their own special ministry gifts and skills. The search process should result in creating the best match for both the pastor and the church (page viii).

It must be stressed that all members of the search committee adhere to strict confidentiality standards. The names of pastors being considered must be kept in confidence. When asking pastors to complete questionnaires or when conducting telephone or face-to-face interviews, state up front that confidentiality will be respected (page 7).

When a pastor leaves a church, members and friends will have varying emotions to deal with. People may feel denial that their pastor would consider leaving, anger when they realize that he or she is leaving, guilt because they feel some burden of personal responsibility for his or her departure, fear for what will happen to their church, or relief if they did not like him or her. Some people may even go through stages of depression. Others may pull away from the church and ultimately even leave. This grieving process is normal (page 18).

“They should have given me their church profile first, then asked me if I felt at all led to consider their ministry, rather than ask on the phone, throw my name into the hopper, and then send a profile” (page 44).

“A monthly letter should inform applicants of the search status. Few things are as frustrating as sending off an application and not hearing back for three months” (page 44).

During the search process, an easily overlooked factor in communications is the pastor’s spouse and children. Pastors have spouses with their own careers, family issues, and children with their unique needs and school and sports commitments – the same as the rest of us. You must consider the needs and interests of the spouse in the materials you prepare, the manner in which you present your church, and in your written and telephone communications. Include him or her in any interviews. Seek out information on his or her gifts and ministries. Be sensitive if he or she does not desire an active role in the ministry of the church. You may lose a qualified pastor if you do not include the spouse in the search process (page 46).

Smile of the Month

It is said that during a service at an old synagogue in Eastern Europe, when the Shema prayer was said, half the congregants stood up and half remained sitting.



The half that was seated started yelling at those standing to sit down, and the ones standing yelled at the ones sitting to stand up.

The rabbi, learned as he was in the Law and commentaries, didn’t know what to do. His congregation suggested that he consult a housebound 98-year-old man, who was one of the original founders of their temple. The rabbi hoped the elderly man would be able to tell him what the actual temple tradition was, so he went to the nursing home with a representative of each faction of the congregation.

The one whose followers stood during Shema said to the old man, “Is it our tradition to stand during this prayer?” The old man answered, “No, that is not our tradition.”

The one whose followers sat asked, “Is it our tradition to sit during Shema?” The old man answered, “No, that is not our tradition.”

Then the rabbi said to the old man, “The congregants fight all the time, yelling at each other about whether they should sit or stand...”

The old man interrupted, exclaiming, “THAT is our tradition!”

Barber Clippings

This month we welcomed Jon Micah Richardson as the new youth minister. I have known Jon Micah for ten years. I was glad when I heard he would be coming here to work. He brings training, experience, and enthusiasm. It is good that the church enjoyed a good search process for the youth minister. The committees were dedicated groups who worked hard and communicated well to the congregation.

We have completed the invitation to participate in the self study. More than 700 gave their thoughts on many aspects of this congregation and the desired qualities of the

next preacher. There are also questions that invite self-inspection. Volunteers have transferred the information to a web site that will tabulate, analyze, and graph the results. We are using: www.surveymonkey.com . From experience, I can tell you that is easier than hand counting and graphing.

The elders and staff are meeting to evaluate and discuss how we can lead more effectively and communicate better to the church. What specific work do we see God helping us carry out? What can this congregation anticipate in the years ahead? What might God do that we have never dreamed (Ephesians 3:20, 21)? The elders have two Saturdays scheduled in May for this purpose.

Gail continues to enjoy Ladies Bible Class on Tuesday and Senior Moments on Wednesday.

The brethren at Hendersonville are encouraging. Some preacher will be blessed to work with this staff and this congregation.

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John Parker

Paul Seawright and I expect our book *Abide With Me: a Photographic Journey Through Great British Hymns* to be released in May by New Leaf Press. It features Paul's brilliant photographs and my articles featuring the sites in Britain where great hymns like "Amazing Grace" and "Rock of Ages" were written. I will be offering the book for purchase at a cost of \$19.99 plus shipping. Full details for ordering will be in next month's newsletter. The book will also be carried in bookstores across the nation.

I am on sabbatical from Lipscomb to work on a set of videos that feature Biblical, social, and ethical lessons found in Shakespeare plays. It will be offered to teachers of Shakespeare in Christian schools and home schools. The videos supplement the study of *Romeo and Juliet* and other plays normally taught in high school.

My wife Jill is presenting her series "A Land that I will Show You" to a ladies class at Granny White. It features Power Point slides of sites we visited in Israel last summer and Biblical lessons related to them. She is available for presenting the lessons to ladies classes. I am available for presenting those same lessons, lessons featuring the great hymns, and of course for interim preaching. Please see my website at www.interimcofc.com .

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