

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

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Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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Barber Bullets for Preacher Search

by Jerrie Barber

We had about fifteen people attend one of the two Saturday training workshops to begin the process of selecting the next pulpit minister. There are three groups that will be involved: Search Committee, Interview Committee, and the elders. I discussed the following suggestions at the conclusion of the workshop.



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- Invite God to be part of this process. Remind yourself and others that His wisdom is available to those who pray for it (James 1:5) and work for it (Proverbs 2:1-5).
- The process is as important as the product. The Christians on the Search/Interview committees are not just doing a job but are participating in an opportunity to grow spiritually. You can learn about God, about others, and about yourself.
- What are your rules? What are the spoken guidelines? What are the unspoken expectations?
- Spend five minutes at the end of each session to evaluate the process. How did we do? Was I heard? How am I feeling about what we are doing? How am I relating to others in the group? Do I feel part of the team?
- Consider a “no suicide” contract. Sometimes people get tired, disillusioned, or frustrated when working on a project. They may quit unexpectedly in disgust: “Now they will know how important I was.” A better way is to keep current. It may be in the process of this selection that one or more will have a good reason not to complete the assignment. Communicate to the group your intentions and reasons and give them time to adjust to your absence on the committee.
- When you are pursuing a “good preacher,” your first task is not to “hire” him. The first objective is to help you and him determine if the Hendersonville church of Christ is a good fit. When and if you talk with a “good preacher,” and you and/or he decides it is not a good fit, you have been more successful than if you had “hired” a “good preacher” that doesn’t fit.
- Keep in mind that it is not only the preacher that is “trying out” in this process. The congregation is also “trying out.” Both have choices. If he is a “good preacher,” he is watching and investigating every aspect of this congregation just as you are watching and investigating him.
- Don’t promise prospective preachers much.
- Do what you promise.
- Keep everyone in the process informed. This is a time of stress for many people. If a person is no longer in consideration, let him know it. If it will be longer to complete a particular phase than you stated, let the people involved know it. If it has been some time since you communicated to those involved and you don’t have anything to say, let them know you don’t have anything to say.
- Keep the congregation informed. On a regular schedule (two to three weeks), give a brief report. Obviously, no names will be mentioned. Communicate with specifics: “We have received 63 suggestions from members at Hendersonville and 42 résumés have been submitted. We have contacted all but 6 who were not available. Ten said they were not interested in further consideration.”
- Be sensitive to the family. The wife and children will be part of the decision and will be vital to the happiness after the move. A special activity for the children when they visit will make an impression. Leaving them in a motel to watch soap operas while Dad is being interviewed will also leave an impression.
- When the family visits to begin making the final decision, continue to plan activities to give them information about the church and community, but also



leave adequate free time. They may need time to pray, talk about you, question, doubt, make calls for advice, and think.

- Do diligence on checking references. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32, NKJV). It has been my experience that many people do an inadequate job of learning about prospective preachers. It is my opinion that you are not ready to select a preacher (and the preacher is not ready to select you) until you know – not only what you like – but also what you don’t like and how you will put up with it. If you are not aware of his weaknesses, you don’t know him well enough. [See Reference Interview Form](#) .
- Plan a *Funeral – Graduation Party* at the conclusion to celebrate your good work and to reflect on what you have learned about God, about His church, about others, and about yourself.

I appreciate your willingness to work in this significant way in this congregation at this time. I have enjoyed our time together. I have been glad to give some thoughts on the process. I will not be involved in discussing the persons you will be considering. I will not be a reference for or a critic against the men who will be considered.

May God bless you as you seek His wisdom in this process.

Consider what others and I have said and feel free to:



Jerrie W. Barber

Elements of a Good Hymn

by John Parker

An article by the American and Canadian Hymn Society journal *Hymns* reported which hymns were the most frequently included in forty hymnbooks published 1986-1996. Related to this matter is what makes a good hymn. In my view, among the most important factors are theme, poetry quality, and music quality.



Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, said, “To write a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.” The same is true for hymns. “Amazing Grace” and “Rock of Ages” are great in part because they deal with mighty themes: the grace of God and the sacrificial death of Jesus. A song is not great only because of theme: a song with a great theme but poor quality in poetic lyrics will not be great. But the great theme must be there.

Great poetry involves many factors, but among them are word choice, syntax, metrical consistency, quality of rhyming, and fit of words to music, as well as many others. Only hymns that have these qualities survive.

I am not qualified to discuss music, but knowledgeable music scholars and teacher in music positions can comment on these.

Of the hundreds of hymns published in forty hymnals during these years, none was published in all forty. That may be good as it reflects good discrimination on the part of the publishers. Two hymns were published in 39 out of 40, “O God our Help in Ages Past” and “Silent Night”. We will examine the first here.

“O God Our Help in Ages Past” was written by Isaac Watts; he and Charles Wesley were the greatest of the English hymn writers. Four times a day the chimes from a tower in the center of Southampton, Watts’ home city, ring out the tune of this great hymn. Even a cursory glance at the lyrics reveals why it is successful.

First, they are stately and dignified. Second, they are composed of simple words: most are one or two syllables. Third, the lyrics follow a logical order: they begin with praise (verses 1-2) and then proceed in the following verses to an account of the order of God’s creation. Finally, there is a return to praise for God’s care of his saints.

The rhythm of the hymn is also simple and easy to follow. Each verse consists of four parts, each part beginning and ending in an obvious and clear fashion. Further, the final word of parts one and three of each verse always rhyme, as do the final words of parts two and four of each verse.

So one of the two hymns most often included in hymnals printed during this decade is one of the simplest, but one of the grandest and most profound. Often it takes genius to produce that which is simple and profound.

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

How easy is it for the proper-false
In women’s waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be.
[The natural trusting nature of women make them vulnerable to handsome,
deceitful men]



Twelfth Night 2.1

Let still the woman take
An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband’s heart.
[If a woman marries a man older than she she will adapt to him and keep steady and
constant]

Twelfth Night 2.4

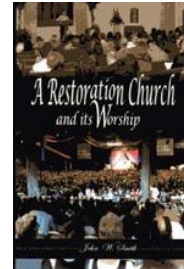
Love sought is good, but given unsought is better.

Twelfth Night 3.1

Haply your eye shall light upon some toy
You have desire to purchase, and your store,
I think, is not for idle markets, sir.

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

A Restoration Church and its Worship, by John W. Smith, copyright 2006
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“To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart by the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God” – William Temp (page 1).

The incident reminded me of the fact that we are a restless, frustrated, fun-seeking, nervous, dissatisfied society. We try to turn everything into *fun*- in fact, *fun* is the basic evaluating criteria for all we choose. I hear folks talk about *fun* diets, *fun* jobs, *fun* exercise programs, *fun* classes, *fun* churches, people who are *fun*, sports that are *fun*, movies that are *fun*, even cars that are *fun*. When anything isn't *fun* anymore, we drop it and go in search of whatever is. When college isn't *fun*, we quit, when the car isn't *fun*, we trade, when our spouse isn't *fun*, we look for another, when the church isn't *fun*, we go church shopping, when raising kids isn't *fun*, we send them to nursery school, day care, and mother's day out. We turn them over to youth ministers or scout leaders, teachers or the television and video industry (page 55).

Where did we get the idea that service to God was supposed to be fun? Nowhere in scripture is there the slightest indication that discipleship will be a thrill-a-minute experience that will leave us laughing with ecstasy. It is no wonder that so many Christians weep the tears of an oversold imagination. When their faith does not bring them the joy they anticipated, it is no wonder they go looking elsewhere (page 56).

That is an important principle for us. One of the main reasons why we often reach an impasse in our discussions about making changes in our worship forms is that both those who want the changes made, and those who want things to stay the same, are insisting that things be done to *their liking*.

We need to remember that just because either the leaders or the congregation *like* some new forms of worship, does not necessarily mean that we should use them. But that idea cuts in two directions. It is also true that just because some *like* the way we are doing it now does not mean that it is the best, or that we should continue to do it. *Liking, or not liking* is not the criteria for determining what we do in worship (pages 58, 59).

I always marvel at corporate worship. It takes on a mystical tone as I recall the promise of Jesus to be with us. I wonder how that is so? I share in a unique way with each fellow worshipper the commemoration of His sufferings, the joy of His resurrection, the majesty of His holiness, the realization of His forgiveness, the fear of His wrath, the hope of His glory, the fellowship of His salvation (page 78).

Spiritual worship is an experience in the *absolute reality* of the spiritual world and it confirms the unreality of this transient one. By faith we, like Abraham, “look for a city *with foundations* whose builder and maker is God.”

Spiritual worship is a vision of God as in Isaiah 6: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I *saw* the Lord, high and holy and lifted up.” Worship is a soul standing in awe before the mystery of the universe. It is a man wrestling with angels who are ascending and descending on a ladder that reaches to heaven. It is seeing the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. That is why we say at communion, “Let our minds go back and *see* Jesus hanging between heaven and earth” (pages 91, 92).

Smile of the Month

My cousin Doug is married to an ecologically conscious woman. One day while Doug was unpacking groceries in their tiny kitchen, he became frustrated by the lack of pantry space. He pulled a package of plastic-foam plates from a shelf and barked at his wife, “Are you ever going to use these?”



“No!” She replied. “They’re not biodegradable.” “Well,” Doug exclaimed, “then throw them away!” (*Reader’s Digest*, September, 1919, page 79).

Barber Clippings

The elders at Hendersonville announced the Search Committee and the Interview Committee two weeks ago Sunday. The committees had an organizational meeting with the elders last Thursday night. The congregation has been invited to submit names of preachers that might be good for this congregation. The church has already received several résumés.

For a good preacher who wants a challenging and rewarding work, I would highly recommend the Hendersonville congregation. Interested candidates please send resumes and credentials confidentially to hcocresumes@yahoo.com .

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John Parker

Jill and I are beginning our fourth month with the Fairview, Tennessee, congregation. We had a gospel meeting with last month and look forward to our VBS July 12-16. This Sunday the elders announced that the church would be deliberate in seeking a new preacher and not move too swiftly. A search committee will be formed soon. Jill and I look forward to having the church down to our farm for fellowship there on July 25.

I will attend the meeting of the Inner City Ministries Board of Directors July 18.

Jill and I enjoyed attending the Pepperdine lectureship May 5-8. We attended some fine sessions and spent time with friends there, including Alexander and Eleni Melirrytos of the Omonia congregation in Athens, both of whom spoke on the lectures. During the last two weeks of June we traveled to Greece where I was the keynote speaker for the fifth annual Christian Family Retreat which Alexander coordinated. We met at a nice hotel on the Corinthian Gulf at Biblical Cenchrea, a short distance from ancient Corinth. About 85 people attended whose home nations were Greece, Bulgaria, Russia, and America. The theme was Jesus' statement "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." The language differences were a challenge requiring regular use of translators, but they were also a joy as we were reminded that we were brothers and sisters in Christ from differing cultures. Jill spoke to the ladies, and we also heard fine lessons from Larry Swaim, Doran Claiborne, and Rick Chambless of the Smyrna congregation and Alexander and Dino Roussos of the Omonia church in Athens. We visited the ruins of Corinth and enjoyed meals and fellowship together. On Sunday I preached for the Athens church and we toured the Acropolis and Mars Hill. Alexander and Eleni are supported in part by the Granny White church where I am an elder. They are among the finest missionaries we know and are among our dearest friends.

My book *Abide With Me* with photographer Paul Seawright is now being distributed, and it is scheduled to appear in major stores. I was privileged to have a signing session at the Gospel Advocate last month, and I spoke twice on the great hymns at the Lipscomb University Summer Celebration July 2-3. I supply autographed copies of the book which may be ordered at www.abidewithmehymns.com.

This month I am working with Lipscomb director of theater Mike Fernandez and Nashville videographer Russ Sturgeon on a video on *Romeo and Juliet* with a Biblical emphasis intended for students in Christian high schools. The film features two young adults talking about how the play is relevant to the lives of young people today. This week we are completing screen tests for the principal roles, and we hope to film the first week of August.

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