

Ideas to Let Pastors Know They are Appreciated



Dear Colleagues:

Although the first article, “How to Show Appreciation to Your Pastor,” focuses on congregational support for the pastor, its principles also apply to a principal or teacher who is part of the pastor’s congregation. The second article, “Five Things You Can Do to Support Your Pastor,” identifies five more ways you will be blessed as you minister to the one who ministers to you. A wise and astute principal and teacher will desire to develop a warm, cordial relationship with the pastor and demonstrate, in a tangible manner, an appreciation for his ministry. Part of your ministry is to enhance the pastor’s, and collectively you and the pastor should work as a team supporting each other’s ministry. Both the church and the school will benefit from this positive relationship.

As you read through the 20 points of appreciation, ask yourself the following questions:

1. How many of these points have you tangibly demonstrated to show appreciation to your pastor?
2. Are you doing all that you can do to support your pastor and his/her family?
3. What more can you do in tangible ways to demonstrate that his/her ministry is respected and appreciated?

It has been said that the difference between ordinary and extraordinary – is that little extra time. May we put forth that “little extra” to help bond with our pastors.

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How to Show Appreciation to Your Pastor

by Oliver J. McKinney, Jr.

Being a pastor is tough in these times. Caught between shrinking budgets and the rising demands of a world gone mad, faithful pastors are struggling to survive their ministry. There are good pastors, and there are bad pastors. Just as there are good people, and there are bad people. Showing appreciation to your pastor does not necessarily mean you approve of every decision he makes. It also does not mean you have to applaud everything he does. James Dobson makes the following observations in his August 1998 newsletter as he emphasizes the national “Clergy Appreciation Month” in October.

We must love, support, and undergird our spiritual leaders. First, let your pastors dream. Ask them what the Lord is saying about your local congregation, your community, and the Great Commission as we approach the 21st century. Second, live at peace within your church. Nothing discourages a pastor more than contention in the congregation. It is also displeasing to the Lord. Throughout the scriptures, we have been admonished to put away discord and bitterness. Third, encourage your pastors. The role of leaders is particularly difficult today because of widespread apathy and distraction. Get behind them in enthusiasm and support. And fourth, let your pastor lead. Encourage them to speak boldly about what the Lord has been saying to the heart of the leader.

Here are some tangible ways you can show appreciation and love for your pastor and his family.

Be sensitive to pastoral stressors. The job looks easy. The pastor dresses in nice clothes, he reads nice books, works with nice people, he is free to order his day, he has a relaxed schedule, but from the inside it’s very stressful. Pastors are on call 24 hours a day so there is a tendency to overwork; they feel the weight of the responsibility God has placed on them. However, there is only so much a person can do. This violates a pastor’s thinking because he feels he should always be able to do more. This obviously leads to more stress. Unrealistic expectations of the pastor, criticism, and disputed expectations add to the stress. Every member’s expectation is

different for what they think the pastor should emphasize – visiting, in study, sermons, Bible studies, counseling – every member’s expectation seems realistic. Unfinished work brings stress. Pastors feel guilty for taking time off. There is always more work to do and if they’re not out there doing it, it will never get done, they think. Stress is one of the curses of pastoring.

Resolve congregational conflicts. Strive for peace among each other. Resolve conflict between member and pastor. The problem is not that you will disagree with the pastor, but is the Christian thing done when disagreement arises. Do you communicate with the pastor, or is it shared with everyone, but the pastor? Forgive your pastors. In a high pressure role with a multitude of expectations, mistakes are inevitable. Even Spirit-filled leaders err, sometimes seriously. If patriarchs, prophets, and apostles erred, it should come as no surprise that leaders today can also fumble their faith. All of us exist only by the grace of God.

Share the ministerial load. Find and fulfill your own ministry. Pastors are not called to “do” the work for the church, but to equip the members to do their work for the church. The burden of church work should be distributed among its individual members. Pastors spend an enormous amount of time doing work that others could do better. Share the ministerial load by finding and fulfilling your own ministry.

Encourage interdependence. Pastors provide spiritual nourishment for the congregation, but doesn’t the congregation, as the body of Christ, have a responsibility to nourish the pastor. If you are looking for a ministry, how about ministering to the pastor and his family. Pray for your pastors and (families). Call their names in your devotional life. Keep them on the altar of prayer. No one is totally independent; we are all interdependent. Just as the hand selects food for the body to nourish it, so the body manufactures food to nourish the hand. You have a right to expect spiritual leadership from your pastor, but please don’t expect spiritual perfection. Pastors tend to be independent and self sufficient, and too proud to tell about the pain they’re experiencing. They tend to be loners when it comes to sharing their feelings and needs. People want them to be super human, and they may like playing the part. However, caregivers tend to be poor receivers. Be a minister of encouragement, look for opportunities to compliment, give a testimony about something he did that changed your life, let others know you won’t tolerate criticism of the pastoral family in your presence, listen between the lines in his public presentations, lift him up before the Lord, form a support group, have a pastor’s day,

send him to a seminar, give him professional tools such as a computer, Bible software, and secretarial help.

Recognize the pastor's wife's stressors. Loneliness through frequent moves, losing old friends, hoping to make new friends, meeting new people, having a husband who is seldom home, poor job preparation, no educational training because she worked to put her husband through school, possibly married before choosing to be a pastor which required lifestyle changes are all stress factors for a pastor's wife. Overload through three jobs – home, church, and employee. Many wives are simply juggling responsibilities under enormous stress on a daily basis. They are playing the “super woman” game, and losing.

Respect her identity. “This is our pastor's wife” is a typical way of introducing her, however, she has her own identity. She is not the church's secretary, a message machine, or the church's official organizer. Allow her to be honest. Accept her for herself, with an openness and clarity of person to person communication, not just for her relationship to the pastor.

Recognize limitations and her right to choose her own roles. Understand her gifts. Realize her time is limited. Don't expect her to attend every function at the church, and because you do not see her, don't assume she lacks interest. Don't force her into the shoes of the former pastor's wife. Your pastor will be comfortable, only if she is comfortable. Protect her right to choose her own role in the church.

Take differences with the pastor to the pastor, not his wife. Criticism of the pastor can devastate her. Taking complaints to the wife can hurt her as well as their marriage.

Allow family privacy. Be willing to let the pastor and his family spend time together. Let the pastor be a husband and father. Avoid calling during certain times of the day. Resist the urge to call during supper, for example.

Understand her need for friends. Let her feel she fits in by inviting her to social events. Let her develop her own special circle of friends. Do things for her. Find a creative way to show you care, such as assisting with her children.

Encourage family time. Church congregations don't mean to, but they tend to teach pastors to neglect their children. Eighty percent of pastors surveyed said they believed their pastoral ministry is hurting their families. They feel more guilt towards not serving the church than they do not being with the family. And, families tend to be more understanding some times than the church family is. Therefore, it's easier to neglect the family. Forget the church for a while and they're not too forgiving. Forget the family, and they may simply complain, "Another meeting, daddy?"

Let your pastor's children be themselves. No child should be pressured to be a model Christian. Realize the preacher's kids are just kids. They are just like any other child. Don't reprimand by reminding them they are pastor's children. They are not responsible for setting the example for the church. Let them choose their own vocation. They should not be expected to grow up to be pastors. Treat them as normal children.

Realize when adults idolize pastor's children, their peers taunt them. When adults hold them up as examples, the other kids regard them as goody, goodies. Children fight that image. When asked Bible questions, if the child knows the answers they are proclaimed as "know-it-alls". If they don't know the answers, they are teased.

Befriend the children. Speak well of their parents. Children know how hard their parents work for the church. If they feel he is not appreciated, they may become bitter and cynical towards the church. Value the children for who they are, not whose they are. Don't use them to gain favor with their parents. Teach your children to be kind to them. Do things for their family. Forgive pastor parents when their child goes astray. Give them love and support, not gossip and criticism.

Give special attention to pastoring the new pastoral family. Begin by understanding the grief process, which allows the loss of a loved one. In congregational grief, the church's loyalty to the old pastor may prejudice them against the new. If the previous pastor was loved, members may feel anger toward the one usurping the old pastor's place. If the previous pastor was not loved, members may vent their pastoral anger on the new pastor.

But if the congregation grieves over the loss of one pastor whom they loved, think of the grief faced by the new pastoral family who has just lost all of their friends in the old parish. Understand their uprootedness. They are moving to a new house, the

kids are starting a new school where their first reception as a pastor's child will likely be as though they were a little odd, if the spouse works there is job hunting to be done, and they must find a whole new set of friends. Be sensitive to their grief and challenges.

Find some friendly way to greet the new pastoral family and help them get settled. Perhaps their new home can be cleaned, polished and a little food put in the cabinets. As soon as convenient, have the largest, best planned welcome and installation service possible. Be sure to include the entire family. It is usually much easier for the new pastor to feel accepted than it is for the rest of the pastoral family.

Reference:

Oliver J. McKinney, Jr., "**How to Show Appreciation to Your Pastor**", *Southern Tidings*, October 1998, pgs, 8–11.

5 Things You Can Do to Support Your Pastor

You too will be blessed as you minister to the one who ministers to you.

by Randy Maxwell

Imagine that you are a trained professional with years of schooling – perhaps even a Ph.D. – and years of practical, on-the-job experience. Now picture everyone from the delivery person to the 80-year-old great-grandmother of one of your best clients telling you how to do your job. How would it feel to have your motives, lifestyle, and integrity scrutinized and questioned by those you served? What would it feel like to have your competency and job performance constantly called into question by people who had absolutely zero training in your field? And what if you were expected to be on call 24 hours a day to provide comfort, counseling, advice and guidance to these same people, while never being able to have a problem yourself? Sound like a tough job?

Welcome to the world of the pastor. Pastors are supposed to be perfect in every way – great speakers, theologians, counselors, administrators, evangelists, perfect spouses and parents. But, as the following statistics from a 1991 interdenominational survey of pastors conducted by Fuller Institute reveal, the stress of the job takes an enormous toll:

- 90 percent of pastors work more than 46 hours a week.
- 80 percent believe pastoral ministry has affected their families negatively.
- 33 percent say that being in the ministry is an outright hazard to their family.
- 75 percent report a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.
- 50 percent feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
- 90 percent feel they were inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands.
- 70 percent say they have a lower self-image than when they started in the ministry.
- 40 percent report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
- 33 percent confess involvement in some inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church.
- 70 percent do not have someone they consider a close friend. *

You may have never guessed that your pastor struggled with feelings of loneliness, inadequacy and depression. But now you know. So what can you do about it?

1. Call a moratorium on criticism.

Get control of your tongue. James accurately depicts the power of the tongue and the pain it can produce. “All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be” (James 3:7–10, NIV).

Determine not to use your tongue to tear down the pastor. Look for ways and words to build up and encourage your shepherd. If you do have a legitimate beef, then talk directly to the pastor and avoid spreading the seeds of your discontent among other members. They can’t help the situation, and your criticism will only breed a spirit of negativism in the church.

The same goes for criticizing the pastor in the presence of his or her spouse. Complaining to the pastor’s wife or husband to “get through to the pastor” is a cowardly and insensitive tactic that often makes church attendance unbearable for the spouse. Follow Paul’s admonition not to “let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Eph. 4:20, NIV).

2. Pray for and with the pastor.

Instead of criticizing the pastor, pray for and with him or her. Pastors are special targets of the enemy. Discouragement is Satan’s number one weapon against God’s spiritual leaders. We can support our pastors by praying specifically for God to protect and bless them in several key areas.

- *Humility.* Ask God to give your pastor a servant’s heart and a teachable spirit.
- *Wisdom.* Pray that your pastor will be sensitive to God’s leading, able to discern His plans and purposes.
- *Health.* Ask God to place a hedge of protection around your pastor, keeping him or her in good health and safety when traveling.

•*Family.* As the survey above indicated, pastors feel that the demands of ministry have had a negative impact on their families. Pray for the pastor's relationships with his or her spouse and children. Pray that, next to God, the pastor will put the needs of his or her family first.

•*Time.* Pray that the demands of ministry, such as counseling, committee meetings, visitation and sermon preparation won't overshadow the time your leader needs to spend alone with God. This must remain a top priority in order for God to powerfully use your pastor.

•*Integrity and anointing.* The same things that tempt you tempt pastors. Pray for them to maintain their integrity in all circumstances. Pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be on their ministry. Without the Holy Spirit, a leader's work, no matter how successful by earthly standards, is of no lasting value.

Besides praying *for* your pastor, consider praying *with* your pastor. I approached my pastor last year and asked if I could serve him by being his personal prayer partner. He was genuinely grateful for this offer of spiritual support and friendship and eagerly accepted my offer. When our busy schedules allow it, we get together once a week to share joys and disappointments, prayer requests and the dreams and frustrations of ministry. If you would like to become your pastor's prayer partner, I strongly recommend you get the book *Partners in Prayer*, by John Maxwell (no relation). This book will lead you set-by-step in how to be a partner in prayer with your pastor.

3. Send your pastor cards or notes of appreciation.

I remember seeing a survey of what motivates employees to perform their best, and was surprised to learn that appreciation was a greater motivation than money. The pastor is accustomed to getting blasted for things he or she did or said, or didn't do or say. Surprise your pastor by sending a card letting him know he is in your prayers.

Acknowledge the spiritual gifts you see manifested in your pastor and let her know how her ministry has been a blessing to you. Let your pastors know you appreciate the sacrifices they are willing to make to follow God's calling.

4. Take the kids.

You will endear your pastor and his or her spouse to you forever by volunteering to keep their kids for a few hours so they can spend time alone with each other. Ministry is often stressful to marriage. The spouse of the leader is under

the same microscope of parishioner scrutiny as their mate, and has to play second, third, fourth, or fifteenth fiddle to the needs of others. Call the pastor and ask him or her to get out their calendar and pick a date when you will baby-sit the kids and they will go out on a “date”. Your pastor will rise up and call you blessed!

5. Send your pastor on a retreat.

I remember a six-month period when our church was between pastors and I was the head elder. For six months, in addition to my full-time job, my wife and I filled in as interim pastoral couple at the church. By the end of the six months, we were physically and emotionally exhausted. The church showed its appreciation and love by sending us away for an all-expense-paid weekend in nearby Sun Valley, Idaho. We still talk about that weekend as one of the most refreshing getaways we ever had.

With several other members, pool your resources and send your pastor and family away for a weekend retreat where they can rest, play, and get away from the demands of ministry for a while. The family will never forget your kindness.

Loving and supporting your pastor is a privilege and a practical fulfillment of the golden rule. You will be blessed as you minister to the one who ministers to you. And the benefits you and your church will receive from an encouraged, prayed-for, rested, and appreciated pastor will be too many to count.

Reference:

1. * John Maxwell, *Partners in Prayer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), p. 80.
2. Randy Maxwell, “**5 Things You Can Do to Support Your Pastor**”, *Adventist Review*, October 1999, pgs. 12–14.

MEMO

To: Parents

From: Your Child

1. Don't Spoil Me. I know quite well that I ought not to have all I ask for. I'm only testing you.
2. Don't be afraid to be firm with me I prefer it; it makes me feel secure.
3. Don't let me form bad habits. I have to rely on you to detect them in early stages.
4. Don't make me feel smaller than I am. It only makes me behave stupidly "big."
5. Don't correct me in front of people if you can help it. I'll take much more notice if you talk quietly with me in private.
6. Don't make me feel that my mistakes are sins. It upsets my values.
7. Don't protect me from consequences. I need to learn the painful way sometimes.
8. Don't be too upset when I say, "I hate you." Sometimes it isn't you that I hate but your power to thwart me.
9. Don't take too much notice of my small ailments. Sometimes they get me the attention I need.
10. Don't nag. If you do, I shall have to protect myself by appearing deaf.
11. Don't forget that I cannot explain myself as well as I should like. That is why I am not always accurate.
12. Don't put me off when I ask questions. If you do, you will find that I stop asking and seek my information elsewhere.
13. Don't be inconsistent. That completely confuses me and makes me lose faith in you.
14. Don't tell me my fears are silly. They are terribly real and you can do much to reassure me if you try to understand.
15. Don't ever suggest that you are perfect or infallible. It gives me too great a shock when I discover that you are neither.
16. Don't ever think that it is beneath your dignity to apologize to me. An honest apology makes me feel surprisingly warm towards you.
17. Don't forget I love experimenting. I couldn't get along without it, so please put up with it.
18. Don't forget how quickly I am growing up. It must be very difficult for you to keep pace with me, but please do try.
19. Don't forget that I don't thrive without lots of love and understanding, but I don't need to tell you, do I?
20. Please keep yourself fit and healthy. I need you.