

# CHAPTER 3



**BUILDING a PARTNERSHIP with  
your PASTOR**

## OVERVIEW

The relationship between the Local Lay Leader and the Pastor is vitally important to the Pastor's ministry and to the life of the church. It is hoped that clergy do not view the position of Lay Leader as merely an office but "as a specific ministry that celebrates and promotes the gifts and graces of the laity". It is our hope that pastors' see the Lay Leader's job as living out those responsibilities offered in the Book of Discipline in paragraph 250.1. When the pastor and lay leader work together, true ministry can be enabled.

The following information contains support suggestions for SPPRC committees, which the Lay Leader may want to suggest. The universal response among pastors regarding how to be supportive is prayer.

Relationship and honesty are two key words that must be the cornerstones in the building of this partnership. Relationship involves spending time together, either over lunch, across a desk from each other, or on walks. A set time, either on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis avoids letting this special time getting lost in the busy schedules of our lives. Honesty involves not only complimenting the pastor on the positive aspects of his/her ministry, but gently communicating negative issues so they can be dealt with constructively. Too often churches compliment and support pastors until it is time to jerk the rug from beneath their ministry because negative issues have not been honestly discussed.

### Sent Ministry

The lay leader should view the relationship with the pastor through the lens of "sent ministry" as it applies both to lay leadership and pastoral leadership. Your understanding of this Methodist tradition will influence the dynamics of your relationship and provide a common ground from which to work together to fulfill the mission of the church.

## Honesty

As the primary lay representative of the laity in the local church, it is imperative that the relationship with the pastor be based on a foundation that includes honesty. The nature of the position will naturally involve communication and inter-action with the pastor and the effectiveness of both persons will only be enhanced if the relationship is founded on honesty and mutual trust.

## Prayer Team

Consider organizing a pastor prayer team in the local church. The details of the operation of the prayer team can vary (team size, meeting schedule, etc.) Keep in touch with the pastor on a regular basis to be informed of specific prayer needs concerning health, family, finances, etc. Meet regularly to lift up the pastor or if the schedule permits, have a time of prayer a few minutes prior to the start of worship services.

## **PASTOR/PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEES**

One of the vital responsibilities of the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee is to provide support, encouragement and care for the pastor, the staff, and their families. No church should feel obligated to adopt them all, but you may find several of them to be helpful

**1.** At the committee's first meeting of the New Year, ask each member of the committee to pray for a specific person that year, for example: one member prays for the pastor, another person prays for the pastor's spouse, another for the pastor's children, the secretary, the youth director, the choir director, the custodian, etc. Send that individual a note each month to let them know that you are praying for them.

**2.** Have a covenant/installation service each year following Annual Conference to celebrate the appointment of your pastor for the year. Have a lay leader or other lay persons welcome the pastor and family back for another year, either in worship or in another setting. You might also want to have a reception or a dinner in their honor.

This is important for welcoming new pastors as well as returning pastors.

**3.** Have a staff appreciation dinner or a staff appreciation Sunday to let them know that what they do is noticed and appreciated.

- 4.** Be sure to give a Christmas token of appreciation for pastor and staff. This could be a gift or a Christmas bonus. A large Christmas card, signed by the whole congregation, or a tree of individual Christmas cards or notes can be special. You may want to remember each member of the pastor's family with special notes or gifts as well.
- 5.** Assign a member of the SPPRC to meet with each staff member during the year on a regular basis to offer encouragement, ask how they are doing, if they have concerns, needs, etc., and then report that information back to the committee.
- 6.** Encourage the pastor to take time off. Our conference's guidelines suggest four weeks of vacation time, including three or four Sundays. Some pastor's have a mistaken notion that they are so indispensable to the life of the church that the whole thing will fall apart if they are not there seven days a week, 14 hours a day. This is unhealthy for the pastor and for the church. Insist that your pastor take regular time off each week and vacations as needed. Encourage them to spend time with their spouses, families and friends. Some individuals generously offer to share their lake cabins, condo's, and homes for a family get-a-way. During an especially busy week, provide dinner one night. Be creative in offering care!
- 7.** Encourage pastors and staff to attend continuing education events. If your church budget does not include funds for this purpose, consider approaching individuals who could help with these costs. Pastors are required to earn three units on Continuing Education Units (30 classroom hours) each year. After a pastor has served four or five years, consider offering a sabbatical leave for an extended time of education and spiritual renewal. Time taken for continuing education or spiritual formation/renewal should never be considered vacation time or days off.
- 8.** Organize a letter or card campaign within the congregation, at random times, to let your pastor or staff know that you appreciate them, care about them, and are rooting for them. Remember caregivers, like church staff, often have very few people actively caring for them. This can easily lead to burn-out, discouragement, or depression.

**9.** Consider setting up an annual or semi-annual spiritual retreat time for the pastor, or pastor and staff together. Time away from the office to pray, share study scripture, and discern God's leading for their lives and your congregation can be tremendously beneficial for everyone. If you have single parents on your staff, be sure to offer assistance with child care arrangements.

**10.** Encourage your pastor's spouse to attend the conference clergy spouse retreat and provide financial assistance if possible. Encourage your pastor and spouse to participate in other district or conference fellowship gatherings. Dealing with the isolation of being in ministry is a constant challenge. Encourage your pastor and family to spend time with friends beyond your local church.

**11.** Help interpret the many responsibilities of being a pastor to your congregation. In order to effectively reach out to the unchurched, pastors need to be spending significant amounts of time with people who are not members of your congregation. This may mean that the laity needs to assist with visitation of the homebound and hospitalized, caring for the details of church programming, and helping with other tasks in order to free up the pastor's time for evangelism, sermon preparation, teaching and prayer.

**12.** Make sure your pastor and staff hear the positive comments about their work that may be shared with you, as well as the concerns. Constructive criticism needs to be dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner. Remember that everyone does a better job when they receive regular, genuine affirmation and encouragement---notes, hugs, flowers, phone calls---these can make all the difference in keeping quality church staff and pastors.

**The following is a dialogue between pastors and lay leaders. Hopefully, you will find this enlightening and helpful.**

**How do pastors view the role of the Lay Leader? What do pastors see as the Lay Leader's job?**

1. Pastors view the Lay Leader as a liaison between the Annual Conference and the Local Church; one who has the pulse of the church community; a buffer between the local church and the pastor.

**What qualities or gifts do pastors deem important in a Lay Leader?**

1. Open minded, a leader (but especially a servant leader); strong personal relationship with Christ; good communicator; active and involved in the church (knows the church); has some understanding of the Methodist doctrine, and trust.
2. A people person, broad shoulders; a listener, non-biased; doesn't have to be a problem solver; positive attitude; well-known; trustworthy (there must be trust between the pastor and lay leader, and between the lay leader and the pastor); encourager, communicator; good eater (several times it was suggested that the pastor and the lay leader share meals together to talk, and to get to know each other!).

**What characteristics of a pastor help the Lay Leader in his/her role?**

1. Good work ethic, strong spiritual leadership, an equipper of the laity, not a control freak; a person who can accept praise as well as talk about sensitive issues; one who has time to talk.
2. Ability to identify gifts in lay people; a leader who doesn't have to shoulder the whole load himself/herself; equipper of the laity; positive attitude; someone with whom we are able to disagree; not aggressive; affirming; assertive; decision

maker; supportive; when there is disagreement---communicate, prioritize, and compromise.

#### **How can the Lay Leader be of assistance to the Pastor?**

1. Interpret the needs of the church, be honest with the pastor—praise in public, discuss concerns privately, but do discuss them!, challenge and motivate laity.
2. Buy his or her lunch!, help the pastor get to know the members; be approachable by the laity; share the burden of the ministry; be available to the pastor; help laity understand the connection; interpret conference decisions to the laity; have an understanding of the United Methodist background, polity, how the system works.

#### **How can the Pastor be of assistance to the Lay Leader?**

1. Help identify the Lay Leader's gifts, pray for him/her; be willing to meet monthly; keep the lay leader informed, especially of problems; communicate; be approachable.

#### **What are things that the Lay Leader can do that compromise the effectiveness of the Pastor?**

Be uninvolved, uninformed with regard to the pulse of the laity, betray the pastor's trust; be a motor mouth, betray confidentiality; undermine the authority of the pastor; fail to be honest with the pastor (fail to communicate concerns as they are encountered, wait until they grow into big problems).

#### **How do the Pastor and Lay Leader adjust when the elected Lay Leader isn't the real Lay Leader?**

1. Realize that this happens, it should happen, we grow into our positions, use the real leader for advice, counsel; be aware that the situation exists; realize that

each person can be used in different situations, respect the retirement of the 'real' lay leader.

**What are the pitfalls or land mines that the Lay Leader should watch out for, from the viewpoint of pastors and/or experienced lay leaders?**

1. Analyze what people say; be sure you are getting a true picture of what is going on, not just hearing the squeaky wheel; don't get tunnel vision; be open to other's ideas.

**What has made you feel good about your role as lay leader? What has made you feel less than effective?**

1. Seeing opportunities made me feel good. Sometimes I threw the idea out but didn't work to see it come about. Got too busy.

**What is the Lay Leader's role when a new pastor is appointed to a church?**

1. Get to know him/her, welcome, discuss the needs; point out key people; give an honest true evaluation of the church, not just your personal biases.
2. Be a good buffer, a barometer for change; pastor and lay leader talk before changes are made (make decisions together); make sure all people are communicating.

## 8 WAYS to ENCOURAGE YOUR PASTOR

By Victor Parachin

Sometimes pastors are the loneliest people in the church. Often their hours are long, the pay minimal, the criticism considerable and constant. Feelings of disappointment, discouragement, and defeat may begin to plague the best of them. Paul's admonition to "serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13) should encourage us to remember our shepherds. Here are eight ways to make their lives better.

### 1. Cut the criticism

Before his death, Presbyterian minister Fred Rogers, creator and host of television's "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood," gave an address describing the time he was a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and attended a different church each Sunday in order to hear a variety of preachers.

One Sunday he was treated to "the most poorly crafted sermon (he) had ever heard." But when he turned to the friend who had accompanied him, he found her in tears. "It was *exactly* what I needed to hear," she told Rogers.

"That's when I realized," he told his audience, "that the space between someone doing the best he or she can and someone in need is holy ground. The Holy Spirit had transformed that feeble sermon for her—and as it turned out, for me too." Unlike most workers who are evaluated once or twice a year, clergy are often critiqued weekly after each worship service. It's not unusual to hear people say, "The music was poor," "the hymn selection was awful", or "the sermon was boring." We would do well to remember that most spiritual leaders work hard to make worship a unique celebration each week.

### 2. Pray regularly

Ask God to shower your pastor with an abundance of love, hope, joy, faith, peace, power, wisdom, and courage. Pray for your spiritual leader's maturity and growth in the faith. As you pray keep in mind this wisdom from German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "If you treat a person as he is, he will stay as he is; but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be, he will become what he ought to be and could be."

### 3. Express appreciation in writing

A spoken compliment is always welcome, but a written one can be read over and over again for years. So, when you hear or see something you like from your minister, write an appreciative note.

#### **4. Use your skills to bless**

Are you proficient with computers? Help your pastor master the church's new computer. Are you a mechanic? Offer to service the car free of charge or at a reduced fee. One pastor I know recalls: "I was pasturing my first church—a small congregation with limited resources. While there, I developed a series of dental problems and could not afford treatment. What a joy it was when a dentist in the church offered to treat me for free. Correcting my dental problem involved nearly a dozen visits. He treated me carefully and cheerfully each time. I have thought of that dentist many times since then and the memories of his kindness continue to bless my life."

#### **5. Squelch gossip**

If you hear a negative comment, respond with a positive one. If misinformation is being spread, correct it with the accurate information. Or, if people are gossiping, just walk away. Remember the Bible soundly condemns gossip and careless speech. James 1:26 says, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." And Psalm 34:13 reads, "Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies."

#### **6. Offer to meet a need**

Some people make their spiritual leaders defensive and angry by saying, "You need to...." That approach is seldom welcome and almost always counterproductive. If you see a need, approach your spiritual leader by saying, "I'd like to help by....." If you see an area that can be improved, take responsibility for working on it. Be an active participant in your church. Get involved by teaching a class, leading a workshop, singing in the choir, feeding the hungry. Ask your spiritual leader where and how you can employ your gifts.

#### **7. Be openly responsive**

Nothing so animates and excites a spiritual leader as seeing people responds to the preaching and teaching. Imagine the surprise and delight of a pastor in Virginia Beach, Virginia, who, when greeting a visitor to his church, found she came because of the kindness of a church member who was her neighbor.

"I'm recently divorced, a single parent and new to this community," she told the pastor. "To keep up with rent and provide for my three children, I must work two jobs. That leaves me very little time for yard work. I was relieved when the weeds didn't overrun my yard, as I had feared they might. However, when I made an unscheduled trip home in the middle of my workday, I discovered the reason why the weeds had not taken over my yard. "My 86 year-old neighbor—a member of your church—was on his hands and knees pulling my weeds. I barely knew this man and he was embarrassed to be caught in this anonymous act of kindness. He explained that he heard you preach a sermon on the importance of living a life of compassion and kindness and decided to put that sermon into practice by weeding my lawn."

One pastor's heart was filled with joy when a group of women in Washington, D.C., responded to a sermon preached from the words of Jesus—"Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1). After hearing the sermon, the women decided to give a baby shower for the young woman who provided childcare while they met for Bible study. She was unmarried, close to going on welfare, and without support from her family or the father-to-be. The young woman was moved to tears by the surprise baby shower. Later, the women explained to the pastor, "Your sermon taught us that it's possible to reach out to someone in the need---in this case, an unwed mother---without judging or condoning the situation."

#### **8. Throw away the measuring stick**

Don't expect that your present spiritual leaders will do things the same way their predecessors did. Lay aside personal agendas and preferences. Instead, focus on how your leader is being used by God to do effective ministry now. By serving your shepherds, you will ensure that they will not only be encouraged but will feel appreciated and continue to minister with enthusiasm and energy.