

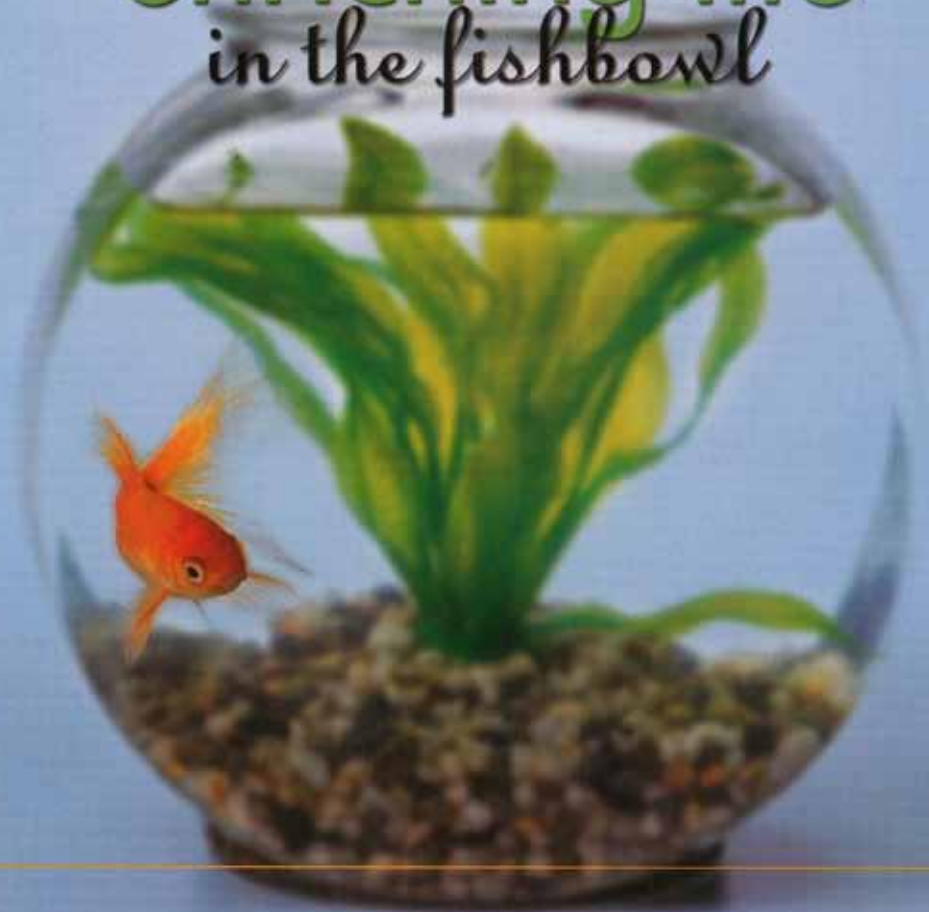


THE  
PASTOR'S  
ADVOCATE  
SERIES



*Ministering to the  
Needs of Your Minister*

enriching life  
in the fishbowl



## Introduction

In churches large and small, a delightful topic of conversation is always the pastoral family: what they wear, what they drive, where they go on vacation, how the kids behave, what their house looks like, etc. Though many church folks may not pause long enough to view this from the other side, ministers have a common phrase for it: “life in the fishbowl.”

Pastors start to suspect that congregations not only hold a set of expectations for them and their families, but also intend to help them live up to those standards. Now, that's pressure! In more than a few churches, of course, the pastoral household never measures up. The inability to be “perfect goldfish” causes them to leave a church prematurely or even to throw up their hands, cry “What's the use?” and leave the ministry altogether.

What can church members do to prevent this? *The first step is to realize that a pastor is not a goldfish.*



Have you ever taken time to watch those beautiful creatures swimming gracefully in their confines? They seem so serene, safe and well-fed as they cruise from one side of the bowl to the other. But do they enjoy being on display 24 hours a day? What do they think about the piercing eyes of the outside world that stare at them?

I was a “preacher's kid” in a family filled with preachers, and I was a pastor for more than three decades. My parents never lived next door to the church we served, but I had grandparents and uncles and aunts who did. Even as a young boy, I could not understand why church people did not respect my relatives' privacy. It was almost as though the pastor was just the caretaker of the parsonage, and when folks needed to use the phone, get a drink of water, use the restroom—or just pop in for a chat—they did. In fact, I scarcely remember my grandfather without a suit coat and tie. He knew what the church expected of him and so, from early morning until late in the evening, he wore a coat and tie.

The churches my wife, Beverley, and I served were wonderful to us and our two boys. They afforded us special opportunities and marvelous kindness. But I did notice that smaller congregations seemed to scrutinize their pastors more than



larger ones. I began in a church with fewer than 100 members and concluded my pastoral ministry in a church of more than 3,000. In my first pastorate, I remember having to get the board's permission, not only to paint the parsonage, but even regarding what color to use. Needless to say, as soon as we (with the help of my mom and dad) could scrape up the funds for a down payment on our own home, we made the move. Unfortunately, that was not until our fourth year in the ministry.

The care and emotional feeding of the pastor and his or her family is often complex and confusing. Here are some suggestions that can make a big difference in the lives of ministers and their long-term ability to guide you.

### *Salary and Retirement Benefits*

The Bible says, "The worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7, NIV). A pastor should be compensated on par with the people being served and with other ministers in the same community. The old philosophy of a pastor "suffering for Jesus' sake" does not hold water, especially if the people are able to adequately provide for the pastoral needs.

Salaries do vary from one section of the country to another, but I talk to pastors all the time who are living below the poverty level. They



usually aren't complaining, but they're barely existing. *This is wrong!* Contrary to what some people think, money matters for ministers are not mysterious or hard to understand. Few pastors are in the ministry for financial gain. Most feel called by God. But, like every other family, there has to be enough money to meet the needs.

Leadership in every church should be more concerned about the physical and fiscal well-being of the pastor and his family than about any other area, with the exception of the pastor's level of spirituality. If merit raises cannot be given every year, at least a cost-of-living increase should be granted. Do you know the average compensation of pastors in your community? Rejoice if your church pays more and take action if your church pays less. Do you know if your pastor has outstanding debt on tuition bills from Bible college or seminary? Lead





your church to help underwrite a portion of those expenses as long as your pastor serves your congregation.

On another note, one of the saddest commentaries on the church is the way some pastors are treated upon retirement. The horror stories that come from many of our retired elders are dreadful. If your pastor does not understand the importance of retirement benefits, *please* provide some reputable counsel. It is not the pastor's responsibility alone to plan for the future—the congregation has a role to play as well.

In all of these areas, the point is not to make anyone rich. It is to give a pastor the freedom to minister instead of worry.

### *Time for Restoration and Relaxation*

In a pastor's life, the "light" is always on. There's always another phone call to make, another parishioner to visit, a sermon to prepare, a talk to give, a funeral to conduct, a wedding to perform—not to mention a family at home to manage. The list is endless.

All pastors need time away with their families as well as time alone with their God. One very popular minister in the United States compares many pastors to "wagons with their wheels coming off,



heading for the ditch." If your pastor is to do better than this, free time is a *must*. Specifically:

- **A day off!** Let pastors pick the best day (or two) each week for them, and then respect their privacy. Don't call. Don't stop by. Don't interrupt . . . unless, of course, there is a true emergency.

One frustrated pastor wrote to me, "The issue on which I believe church people—pastors and laymen—need to hear from you is *boundaries*. Both pastor and people need to realize that pastors do not solve their problems. We are not God, and we are not omniscient."

• **Vacations and personal time off.** Pastors should have *at least* two weeks of vacation each year free from all church responsibility and, because they serve on so many holidays, should also receive replacement days for those occasions. Lay leaders should not only insist on the pastor and his family taking the vacation, but should insist in finding and funding a pulpit replacement when necessary.

I once heard a shocking story about a church board member that docked his pastor for vacation time while he attended the funeral of his daughter, who had been killed in an automobile accident. A church like that does not even deserve a pastor. All pastors should have personal and bereavement days and other benefits, just like you do on your job.

It is my feeling that vacation time should be determined by *the number of years the pastor has served in full-time ministry*—not the tenure at a particular church. For instance, someone who has been a pastor for 15 years should receive at least four or five weeks of vacation, despite the fact that he may have been in the present post only two years.

• **Conferences and retreats.** So often, pastors go dry from giving and giving without any spiritual nurturing of their own. Who pastors the pastor? There are actually many organizations, ministries and individuals who do provide such support, assistance and growth.

Churches should provide at least one opportunity each year for each of their pastoral staff members to be fed. This might be accomplished through a professional conference, a spiritual retreat or a denominational function. Every church will be better served if its leaders are regularly filled with new insights and motivation.



• **“Dates.”** Spending time alone with your spouse is essential to any healthy union. Married *pastors* need it, too. I must confess that, in the early years of my ministry, Beverley and I did not set aside much free time together. I am excited to hear that more pastors and their spouses are dating again—at least once each month.

Caring parishioners can help by offering themselves for baby-sitting duty. It is a proven fact that, when a pastor and spouse are communicating and happy in their relationship, their effectiveness in the church is greatly enhanced.

## *The Right to Privacy*

Compassion and availability make a pastor live in a glass house where the work is never finished and the welcome is expected to be warm at all times. Responsible lay leaders should do all they can to respect the privacy of the pastoral family and encourage others to do the same. Allow your pastor the opportunity to pull down the shades and shut the world out just like other people do. Permit your minister a regular time of family togetherness, marriage privacy and isolated hours for digging into the deepest realities of godliness.

What does privacy mean to a pastor? It is often nothing more than the simple satisfactions everyone else enjoys in everyday living. Privacy means uninterrupted meals, time with family members, time to pray or time to recover from Sunday's strains. Urge your pastor to let the congregation know his regular days off and his typical study times. Help fellow church members understand that a pastor needs the same right to privacy in his own home as they do in theirs.

Surveys show pastors average less than two nights per week at home. Consequently, family time is always at a premium. Lead a charge to help your pastor take more time away from the church. Time away doesn't cost—it pays. A well-rested pastor with a balanced schedule always serves a church better over the long haul.

## *Prayer, Love and Encouragement*

These three words form an unbeatable combination! As a very young pastor, I had folks who stood beside me when I really didn't deserve their loyalty. I was inexperienced, prone to error and frightened by the magnitude of my assignment. But people believed in me and saw the potential I could not see.



• ***Pray for your pastor!*** This is, in fact, the very best thing you can do (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Not only is prayer the greatest show of support, but it is very difficult to pray for someone and be critical at the same time. I personally believe a great degree of discord in the church today results from inadequate prayer. People have allowed

differences to divide them instead of letting the Holy Spirit unite them. Prayer not only changes things, but it empowers pastors to be the persons God called them to be. Of all the phrases that thrilled me as a minister, the greatest was when someone in my congregation would say, "Pastor, I'm praying for you."

• ***Love and encourage your pastor.*** As a church body, we need to show the world and one another that good conquers evil and that love is the greatest force in the world. Jesus cautioned that it is easy to say, "I love you," but more difficult to exhibit it daily.



How can you let your pastor know you love him? There are lots of simple ways. Send a note of encouragement. Remember your pastor's

birthday and wedding anniversary. Recognize his or her employment anniversary each year in some tangible way (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Have your congregation participate in Clergy Appreciation Month each October ([www.clergyappreciation.org](http://www.clergyappreciation.org)). Perhaps you might even provide each church member with a copy of this booklet so your vision can be shared.

I can almost guarantee you that, in return, your pastor will give the very best to you and the congregation. Encouragement begets faithful service.

Don't let little things get blown out of proportion. Sometimes this happens to the point of dividing a church and even triggering the pastor's dismissal. This results in a kind of pain that never goes away.

In many ways, the laity can make or break a pastor. You have an awesome responsibility to see that your pastor can stand before you with heart and soul prepared to open the Word of God and deliver a message that is anointed in truth. Your pastor's mind should be free of doubt, distraction and controversy.

### *Congregational Participation*

In nearly every letter I read from pastors describing their dreams for their congregations, I hear a cry for people committed to fulfilling the



Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Many pastors are literally at their wits' end because so many people are simply not involved in the major assignment of the body of Christ—spiritual reproduction. “Tell me how to get my people to realize that spiritual reproduction is not an option,” they plead, “and that it is expected of every person who calls himself by the name of Christ.”

The great mission we are facing cannot be clergy-driven. The clergy must teach and lead, but *the laity must respond* out of love for God and people. The battle against abortion, pornography, immorality and an ever-increasing demise of traditional family values must be fought by convinced *believers*—not simply committed clergy. For this to happen, there must be a renewal within the church. The church must repent and feel sorrow for its unwillingness to be “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16).

In a magazine editorial entitled “America’s Toughest Job,” Moody Bible Institute President Joseph M. Stowell writes:

Pastoring is tougher because of our culture’s consumer mindset. Once, the work ethic prevailed in America. People went to church asking, “What can I do?” Today we ask, “Do I like this preacher? Is the youth program good for my children? Do I like the feel of this place?” Few people enter the church saying, “How can I contribute to the work of Christ here?”

As a pastor, my most exhilarating moments did not come from large crowds, great sermons or successful finance campaigns, but rather from a layperson who had been touched by the power of God and would say, “Pastor, I really want to make a difference in my world. I don’t want to remain stagnant and removed. I want to put on the armor of God and enter the fray. Pastor, will you help me? Will you train me? Will you pray for me?”

Wow! If you want to take your pastor to a new plateau in effectiveness, offer yourself in this way.

### *Permission to Dream and Lead*



Be open to new ideas. More than ever before, your pastor has access to resources and new concepts from the world’s greatest religious leaders. That means your pastor

will probably come to you and your church leaders with ideas and dreams for your congregation that might seem a bit grandiose or





unrealistic. But remember God's power and stay open. Work to keep your pastor dreaming and alive. Please don't let the creative juices dry up.

Phrases like "that won't work," "it costs too much" and "we've tried it before" are deadly. The Holy Spirit is the author of dreams. If your pastor is in touch with God's Spirit, eagerly grasp the opportunity to witness God's touch on the life of your church. Don't be guilty of squelching the Spirit simply because the dreams and hopes seem farfetched and unreachable. If that happens, dreamers stop dreaming or they become reluctant to share new dreams.

Those who thwart God's purpose will stand in judgment. Carefully consider the serious repercussions before resisting a God-given dream of an anointed leader. Dreams are fragile. Before you criticize your pastor's dream, remember this wisdom from an unknown sage: "[A dream] can be killed by a sneer or a yawn; it can be stabbed to death by a quip and worried to death by a frown on the right person's brow."

Do you encourage your pastor's dream? Are you an affirmer or a "foot dragger"? Do you pray that your pastor will be uniquely blessed with creative ways to touch people? How sad it is when the power structure within the congregation will not allow the Spirit to bring it renewal,

to break it out of the mold, to help it realize new truth. It's hard for human control to entertain the thought that God may want to "do a new thing" where you worship (Isaiah 43:18-19, NIV). Do not hinder your pastor's vision, but let your pastor lead. Let your minister be the shepherd as God ordained.

### *The Right of Friendship*

To be a well-adjusted being, everyone needs friends. Do you know who your pastor's closest friends are? The average pastor has few genuinely close friends. Eight out of 10 pastors say they have no one to openly interact with about professional and personal concerns other than their spouse. Every pastor needs a close friend of the same gender, in addition to their spouse. But a serious problem exists because many ministerial training programs and petty rivalries in congregations argue against it. Church members sometimes pout,



feeling threatened, if they know their pastor has a close friend in the congregation or community.

I received a letter from a pastor's wife who tried to surprise her husband with a birthday party. She invited several friends from the church, community and relatives. The pastor was having tough times in his work, so it was nice to see him laugh and have a good time. The pastor's wife was uplifted when the party was over, but unprepared for what followed. The next Sunday, she and her husband were confronted by several lay leaders who told them, in no uncertain terms, that "private parties" were not allowed. They also reminded her that her husband was pastor of the whole church, so she could either invite everyone or stop having parties.

No minister should be expected to forego personal friendships just because he or she is a pastor. Do not make him feel guilty about such an association. Rather, encourage and rejoice over the richness such a connection brings to his life and ministry.

### *Protection from Scrutiny*

Nearly everyone realizes how difficult it is to overlook misdirected words or insensitive acts that hurt one's mate or family. Many ministers find it difficult to tolerate even a hint of criticism against

their families. To keep this scrutiny problem in balance:

- ***Never consider a pastor's spouse an unpaid assistant!***

In reality, the pastor's spouse is usually a layperson married to a minister. During your pastor's service to your church, the spouse's involvement will likely increase and decrease depending on family needs, outside workload and health. Try to view the mate's involvement just as you would that of any other volunteer.

- ***Let kids be kids.*** It is unfair to expect the minister's children to be role models for all the other children in the congregation. Pastors' kids, like all children, come into the world human and subject to the same temptations others experience. Allow a minister's children to develop normally. Let them know they are loved for themselves and not because of who their parents are.



• **Don't deliver secondhand messages through the pastor's family.** If you have something to say, say it directly to the pastor so the message will be clear and you will not injure the person you are considering asking to deliver your message.



### *Realistic Expectations*

The above is not meant to portray a one-way street. *Giving* is an important word for your pastor as well as for you. If you are taking

the above steps to properly care for your pastors and their families, here is what you have a right to expect from them:

• **A full-time effort** (if your pastor serves on a full-time basis). It seems unlikely to me that any pastor could do justice to the position in less than 40-50 hours a week. For me, it took longer. For some, it might take less. But to cover the long list of a minister's duties takes time, and lots of it (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12). However, don't let him overdo it to the endangerment of his health, his family or the congregation.

• **Preparation.** Your pastor need not be the best preacher in the world, but he or she should never step before an audience unprepared. That takes reading, Bible study, prayer and practice (2 Timothy 4:2).

• **Attention and compassion.** A shepherd should know the sheep and their needs. In other words, the pastor should care for you, be a good listener, full of compassion and a seeker after wisdom (John 10:14).

• **Honesty and security.** Your pastor need not "know it all," but should be secure enough to search for answers, even if those answers lie with another pastor (Proverbs 4:10-12).

• **Prayer and faith.** Your pastor needs to be a person full of faith and prayer. A prayerless pastor is a powerless pastor (Matthew 17:20-22).



• **Courage.** Your pastor should be a person of courage, willing to confront evil and injustice. A cowardly pastor is not in close fellowship with the Lord. Pastoring is not for the faint of heart (2 Timothy 1:7; Joshua 1:9).

• **Family integrity and commitment.** Your pastor and his or her family should be an example to the congregation. *No, they do not need to be perfect!* The kids need not be the best behaved in the church. The spouse need not head every committee. But they do need to be a family totally committed to the principles of the Word of God regarding the family unit (Ephesians 5:22-6:4; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9).



• **Congregational training.** Your pastor should spend time training and equipping others to assist in the ministry of pastoral care. For example, we are not all called to be evangelists, but we all are expected to know how to share our faith, both through words and actions. Your pastor should prepare you for the responsibilities of lay ministry by helping you find your gifts (2 Timothy 2:2).

• **Stewardship training.** Your pastor should teach the value of Christian stewardship. If you grasp the significance of tithing your time, talent and treasure, it will not only open up God's special resources for you and your family, but it will also ensure the blessing of God upon your congregation. He has promised to pour His blessings upon you in response to your stewardship (Malachi 3:10; 1 Corinthians 9:6-8).

• **Moral integrity.** Your pastor must be a person of integrity and high values. There should be no hint of immorality in him or ambivalence toward it in others (Ephesians 5:3-5).

• **Openness and vulnerability.** You should expect your pastor to be vulnerable and transparent, willing to admit when mistakes have been made and committed to continued growth in every aspect (Psalm 139:23-24).

• **Personal holiness.** Most important of all, your pastor must be committed to personal holiness. So many clergy are successful by the world's standards, but woefully lacking when it comes to a deep, personal relationship with God (Psalm 51:10-12; Romans 3:22).



### *Strength for the Swim*

Life in the fishbowl—for your pastor and his or her family—is *reality*. It is not an easy assignment. Satan's task is to hinder and undermine those who have been called by God to represent Him. Pastors can survive life in the fishbowl, but not without your tender love, prayer, encouragement and affirmation.

When I look into the pastoral aquarium these days, I'm seeing more and more of my colleagues floating slowly to the top—just like a

goldfish that has lived out its life. Many tell me they are burned out, worn out, frustrated and fatigued.

If ever there was a time when pastors needed to know they are viewed, not with a critical spirit, but with encouragement and affirmation, *it is now*. As Aaron and Hur held up the arms of Moses when he grew weary, every pastor should have the stabilizing forces of a secure and healthy personal family and a compassionate and supportive church family—colleagues who will stand alongside in understanding and camaraderie.

When its leaders are in jeopardy, the church suffers. For too long, the church has played into the enemy's hands by discouraging pastors. It's time for the lay pillars of the church to lock arms and join hearts with their pastors. Our Lord wants pastors and parishioners to move in a mighty, unified effort to revive the church and change the world!

*You* have an opportunity to help your entire pastoral staff and their families realize their hopes and dreams. Please join me in this very worthy calling.

### *About the Author*

*H.B. London is an ordained minister with more than three decades of pastoral experience. He is the vice president of Pastoral Ministries at Focus on the Family. He and his wife, Beverley, have two sons and four grandchildren.*



*The Pastor's Advocate Series is intended to assist congregations in better understanding the needs of their pastors and pastoral families, in better caring for the personal welfare and professional wellbeing of these leaders, and in better teaming with them to maximize their united ministries for Christ.*



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