

To Stay or Not To Stay?

The pastor-congregation relationship cannot be a simple employee-employer contract since the pastor is first a minister of the gospel and then serves as a local pastor.

Further, Baptist congregations select their ministers by finding the Lord's leadership in the selection process.

Adversarial relationships develop when complaints surface, anonymous letters arrive and petitions for removal are presented. In the face of such complaints and to probe personal and professional development the pastor might ask:

1. "Am I at fault?" I must bear the responsibility for my mistakes and oversights.
2. "Have they misunderstood?" Breakdowns in communication must be restored.
3. "Is there dysfunction at work?" Dysfunction at the personal level stems from internal disappointments with life often originating in childhood. Dysfunction becomes a congregational trait if dysfunctional people influence or lead the congregation. Dysfunction, an impairment in relationships, differs from malfunction and nonfunction. When dysfunction is at work there is little the pastor can do to change the dysfunctional person or the dysfunctional system until those involved begin to heal from their dysfunction.
4. "Where is the church in its life cycle?" Churches naturally flow through periods of growth, plateau, decline before the cycle repeats itself.
5. "Can I handle the stress?" Sleep disorders, mood swings and mental distractions may indicate a high stress level. When self induced by an inappropriate leadership style stress will not be altered by relocation.
6. "What will the impact be on my family?" Children in the parsonage should be provided the basic right to have friends, childhood memories and to grow up with a sense of 'home'. Frequent relocation of young families may deny these basic rights and may lead to dysfunction whether those families are military or pastoral families.
7. "Have other doors opened?" There is more to life than being a Baptist pastor, nevertheless, being a Baptist pastor can be most rewarding.
8. "Where am I in my spiritual life?" Decisions about relocation should never be made from the darkness and void of an impoverished devotional life but from the clear light of active communion with the Lord.
9. "What other circumstances are at work?" Life is never simple and it may be necessary to change ministry assignments to secure health insurance or to purchase a retirement home or to meet some other extenuating circumstances.
10. "What do my trusted friends think?" There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors although only the one being counseled makes decisions.

"Success is never final; failure is never fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts."

--Sir Winston Churchill

This version has some substance to it and includes 632 words.

To Stay or Not To Stay?

The pastor-congregation relationship cannot be categorized as a simple employee-employer contract since the pastor first serves as a minister of the gospel and then serves as pastor to a particular congregation.

Baptist congregations who select their ministers by finding the Lord's leadership in the process should even more carefully consider the Lord's will when the time comes to consider discontinuing that relationship.

To stay or not to stay often places the pastor and congregation in an adversarial relationship when complaints surface, anonymous letters arrive and petitions for removal are presented. In the face of such complaints the pastor might well ask four important questions:

1. "Am I at fault?" If I am at fault then I must bear the responsibility for my mistakes and oversights, no one else can shoulder that blame. Responsibility, however, should be borne in proportion to the mistake/oversight. Generally these situations are dealt with one on one or in small groups rather than in a congregational forum.

2. "Have they misunderstood?" If communication has failed then it must be restored. It could be that someone has 'read between the lines' or it could be that the pastor has left too much 'space' between the lines.

3. "Is there dysfunction at work?" Dysfunction at the personal level stems from internal disappointments with life which often originate in childhood. Dysfunction can become a congregational trait if dysfunctional people impose their personality on the congregation. Dysfunction generally describes impairment of relationships and differs from malfunction and nonfunction. If there is dysfunction at work there is little the pastor can do to change the dysfunctional person or the dysfunctional system until those involved can properly identify the root causes of the dysfunction and begin personally and systemically to heal from their dysfunction.

4. "Where is the church in its life cycle?" Churches naturally flow from periods of growth, then plateau, then decline before the cycle repeats itself.

Apart from the conflict cycle the pastor must learn to ask some probing questions regarding personal and professional development. Some of these include:

5. "Can I handle the stress?" Sleep disorders, mood swings and mental/spiritual distractions may indicate the stress level is too high. Some stress, however, may not be geographic but self induced by an inappropriate leadership style. If stress is self induced it will be little altered by relocation.

6. "What will the impact be on my family?" Children in the parsonage should be provided the basic right to have friends, childhood memories and to grow up with a sense of 'home'. Frequent relocation of young families may deny these basic rights and may lead to

dysfunction whether those families are military families or pastoral families.

7. “Have other doors opened?” The Lord only rarely leaves us in between assignments. Generally a new door opens before the old door closes. There is more to life than being a Baptist pastor, nevertheless being a Baptist pastor can be most rewarding.

8. “Where am I in my spiritual life?” Decisions about relocation should never be made from the darkness and void of an impoverished devotional life but from the clear light of active communion with the Lord.

9. “What other circumstances are at work?” Life is never simple and it may be necessary to change ministry locations or ministry assignments to be able to provide health insurance or to be able to purchase a retirement home.

10. “What do my trusted friends think?” There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors; only the one being counseled may make the decision.

Winston Churchill offers some sage advice, “Success is never final; failure is never fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts.”