

# First Steps for a New Pastor

*Suggestions from one who has only done this twice, but has watched many others do it different ways*

## **PRINCIPLES TO EMBRACE**

Philippians 2:12, 13 We work out our good health in situations, including beginnings, and trust God to work in us and through us.

“It is amazing how little you can do in one year and how much you can do in five years.”

Love covers a multitude of \_\_\_\_\_ (sins, mistakes, bad starts, etc.).

Church boards will not think of all this.

Symbols of love and pastoral care and friendship are important.

First impressions are very important. Cliché or not.

“If not you, who? If not now, when?” (ancient Chinese proverb)

## **RELATED TO THE MAIN BOARD**

Within the first few months, sit one-on-one for breakfast with each of the members. Visit where they work if possible. Ask how you can pray for them. No board agenda.

Handwrite a note after this meeting to thank them and share your joy and the prospects of the future and your admiration of their wisdom.

Get with the chairman and ask for one-on-one times before every board meeting. Ask for the agreement that you two will never disagree with each other at a board meeting – so you will have to work out any differences before anything makes the agenda.

Go over the “soccer field” model for the board and staff responsibilities. So many churches, even of size, mix the two and slow down progress and cause misunderstandings. Ask to have the written agenda follow the outline of the four sides of the soccer field – the boundaries that belong to the board.

Agree to the “suggestions for boards” and “rules for boards” with the chairman and then with the board at the first meeting. This honeymoon period is a good time to endorse such “apple pie” rules of operation.

## **WITH THE CHURCH PEOPLE**

Begin immediately some good ways of communicating with the people – a note in the bulletin from the pastor, about emotion or grace or love, not announcements or recruitment; a weekly Friday email that is very short.

Town meetings around the area where 8 to 12 families are invited to a home that is near them. Your part is just to listen to their strong points about the church. A few complaints will come out, but mostly you will listen to what they like. They will get to know each other also.

You can do two in an evening, if the first one has dessert after you leave and the second one has dessert before you get there! So you have just covered 16 to 20 families perhaps!

“Perceived pastoral care” has nothing to do with fake love. It just means that the picture of you and staff standing with people and listening carefully on Sundays, and greeting guests, and looking people in the eye and paying attention – all this shows that you care about individuals. It models that there’s care around this place. All this as opposed to hiding someplace until you speak, or even praying in a corner somewhere when people come to see you in the church building on Sundays!

Start to learn names. You do not need a photographic memory – there are very few of those around. But it does help to hear it first, and say it out loud, and go through the last directory every month for a few minutes. People do prize that you remember names.

## **WITH THE STAFF**

One on one when you can is important, just to listen. Ask what they like about their ministries, and where it is frustrating. Take notes. This is just to get to know them and their challenges.

If it is a larger staff, over five, the beginning is a good time to “let it leak” that with a new pastor often comes a good opportunity to think through new alignments and report systems.

People hate changes and surprises, we all agree. Some change will come.

Be sure there is a time when all the staff – including part time and custodians and everyone – are praying together for Sunday or the weekend. This is very bonding. There is nothing to wait for – start it on Fridays, with coffee or more together, and a one-minute summary of the worship service and a one-minute synopsis of the sermon so people are “in the know” before they pray. People like to be there, and their prayers will help them own Sundays and not just be there.

Many staff members had no regular time to meet with the person they report to – this is the time to set that up on a regular basis. And to naively propose a paper report that

they can fill out in 5 to 10 minutes every week or two, and ask for that. So many had no way of reporting.

Tell them individually and as a group what you expect of them. It's better to do this early on rather than wait to see what they have done before, and then propose a change! There are some advantages to being naïve.

Commend them upfront whenever possible and true.

Understand the worth of staff meetings every week – to dine together and laugh together and cry together and pray together and hear a few reports, but not so many that it's boring.

Be John, or whatever your name is, as opposed to Dr. Smith or even Pastor Smith or Right Reverend..... Be one of them. Be a friend. Walk around to other offices -- two or twenty – once a week to thank them and just to say hello.

## **WITH THE COMMUNITY**

Make a ten- minute appointment to meet the mayor and the local school superintendent or college president. Promise ten minutes truly. And stick with it.

Make short visits to the local para-church ministries that might become your “mercy partners” for the church. You don't want to reinvent the wheel or compete with them. Start with the ones that your church already supports.

By the way, why not have the website and your Sunday bulletin list the ministries you embrace as “mercy partners” -- the ones you give money to regularly and enlist volunteers for or help recruit them at your church.

Walk around the community that is within a half-mile radius of your church, with someone who really knows the area. You will see things you don't see when you drive. As you pray and think about the area, you will get ideas for what the church can do to make a difference.

Start reading the local newspaper.

Call a coffee time with five or six other pastors in the area to meet them and thank them for receiving you into the community.

Make an appointment for a very short meeting to meet the religion editor of the local newspaper. It's important to know that man or woman and to be kind to him or her.

Same with the police chief.

Set up a really good system for assimilation, because some of these community people will visit your church.

### **RELATED TO THE WORSHIP SERVICES**

To a limited extent, pretend you don't do not know the way they have been doing it. Early on is the time to insert some traditions that you need in the services.

Decide when you will start and finish the services, and stay with the plan. Most people like punctuality.

### **WITH GOD**

Set up a personal time to pray for the church three or four times a week just by yourself.

Start a "prayer partners" ministry with men of the church. I can send you a paper on how this Friday morning short meeting can work. The praying is only for character and Sunday.

Dig in for the long haul, with love for God and people, in that order.

### **WITH YOUR FAMILY**

Establish patterns right away related to weekly family times and appointments one on one with children and dates with your wife. Monitor carefully how people are receiving them and also how they are adapting to feel at home, at school and at church. Nothing to force here, but certainly to care.

Set a pattern for when you will pray and read the Bible together. Start the tradition for this new place and time right away.