



Preacher's Pen *by Gene McCoy*



The relatively brief tenure of preachers in local congregations has been discussed through the years and likened to that of military personnel and coaches. The military has the reputation for moving its personnel frequently and coaches are expendable when the team has a losing season. Military “brats” and “P.K.s” traditionally share the experience of living in multiple locations and making the transition to various schools.

By the grace of God and the strong work ethic of my preacher father, my siblings and I were not uprooted so frequently. And by God’s grace and the blessing of gracious people, the length of my ministries have far exceeded the norm. When I interviewed for the ministry here, I remember being asked how long I intended to stay. My response was honest and candid. Ultimately, I was committed to stay as long as I or the elders determined God wanted me here—as long as I was effective in the work. Selfishly, I was committed to staying long enough for my three children to complete their secondary education, which was seven years. That, by itself, would exceed the longest ministry of any preacher this congregation had. That interview was twenty years ago!

The longevity of ministry is a testament to several key factors.

Testimony to God’s Grace

We are eager to always attribute all of our blessings and accomplishments to the grace of God. Not only is it by God’s grace that we are members of His body, but also that we have been granted a role to play in His eternal plan of redemption. It is a joy to attribute to God’s grace the opportunity to serve in this capacity for twenty years.

Testimony to a Good Leadership Team

Other servants of God are to receive credit for a preacher’s lengthy ministry. Our congregation has been blessed with some fine leaders, whose counsel and work have made it possible to reach this milestone. These include elders, staff members, deacons and many volunteers whose dedication to serving the Lord makes everyone on the team look good.

Testimony to Congregational Grace

A reason some advocate short ministries is that the preacher, after the so-called “honeymoon” period of one or two years, begins to see the warts and wrinkles in the

lives of the people. But the same is true from the other side of the pulpit. After a while a congregation begins to see the chinks in the preacher’s armor, too. Grace must be extended from both parties for a ministry to endure twenty years! I thank God for the grace this congregation has extended to me. I continue to depend upon it.

Testimony to a Good Family

A preacher’s dedication and faithful service does deserve some credit to account for a lengthy ministry. But the contribution made by the preacher’s family should never be overlooked or discounted when celebrating his effectiveness and longevity. God blessed me with a wonderful family to complement and validate my ministry. One reason this ministry has endured the tests through time is the fact that people like Becky. Her personal insights and professional training have provided valuable counsel and coaching that, when heeded, saved me from grief and regret on numerous occasions.

Active in the ministry and a vital link in the chain of church operations, Becky’s role in my ministry as the preacher has provided value I could never overestimate. She has been and continues to be recognized by the congregation as a wonderful preacher’s wife.

An added blessing has been children whose lives have validated and affirmed this ministry through reputable lives and service to God. The legacy of all parents is impacted somewhat by the lives of their children, but a preacher’s children can have a great impact upon his effectiveness in ministry. I have been blessed with good children who continue to faithfully serve the Lord.

Testimony to Faithfulness

Ministry would be easy if everything went well and everyone behaved like Jesus. But the church is comprised of people who sometimes lack faith, tact and various Christian graces and virtues. Consequently, every church hits a rough patch now and again. That is when some preachers decide

to move on to greener pastures and when some churches decide it’s time for a change in the pulpit.

Faithfulness can be the testimony when two parties work through difficulties together, each accommodating and giving

grace in the interest of the greater goal of representing the Lord in the community.

As would be expected in any relationship spanning two decades, we have experienced discouragement and conflict. There have been setbacks and apparent failures. But, due to the gifts of God celebrated above, the greatest of which is His grace, occasions of joy and happiness, peace and harmony have characterized our relationship and experience.

Testimony to the Community

Faithfulness to our mission has been a testimony to the community. As is common among all groups of people, some have left our fellowship in favor of another. Most never return. But some have. Of those who have never returned, some have actually sought our counsel in some situation that arose in their new church. Some have requested our ministry when their family met with crisis. These testify to the fact that they were at least treated with respect and courtesy, despite the problem that motivated them to leave us. It also testifies to the trust they have in our spiritual and personal integrity.

Among the few who have returned, their reasons include the fact that they have witnessed the faithfulness of the leaders, not only to the Word of God, but also to the preacher, who enjoys their support. In other words, the leaders didn't throw the preacher under the proverbial bus when difficulties arose. That commitment to principle produces an environment of security and stability that brings people back for the right reasons.

Our long ministry relationship also bears a positive testimony throughout the community, specifically that this is a congregation that is stable and dependable. We enjoy respect from the larger community as a result. When non-Christians are prepared to make a commitment to Christ, they are more likely to pursue this relationship in a context that is amicable and calm, as opposed to one continually fraught with conflict and controversy. A long ministry is the testimony of a church that stands together through changing and challenging times.

Testimony to Christian Hospitality

Jesus instructed His disciples in their going with the gospel message to remain where they were offered hospitality (Matt. 10:11; Mk. 6:10; Lk. 9:4;10:7). While the context and specifics are not identical, the principle seems to be that the minister of God should learn contentment and exhibit acceptance of the hospitality granted to him.

We have been treated with gracious hospitality during our extended ministry. It has been a pleasant and rewarding relationship we continue to appreciate and enjoy.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve with you in this comfortable and hospitable place.