



PASTOR'S ANNIVERSARY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday, November 7, 2010

Dennis Laffoon, Guest Cultural Resource Commentator
Pastor, Bethel A.M.E Church, New Albany, IN

I. Introduction

The Perfect Pastor

The Perfect Pastor preaches exactly 10 minutes. They condemn sin roundly, but never hurt anyone's feelings. They work from 8 a.m. until midnight and also work as the church janitor.

The Perfect Pastor makes \$40 a week, wears good clothes, drives a good car, buys good books, and donates \$30 a week to the church. They are 29 years old with 40 years' worth of experience. Above all, they are handsome/beautiful.

The Perfect Pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers and

spend most of their time with the senior citizens. They smile all the time with a straight face because of their sense of humor that keeps them seriously dedicated to the church. They make 15 home visits a day and are always in their office to be handy when needed.

The Perfect Pastor always has time for church meetings and all of its committees, never missing the meeting of any church organization. And they are always busy evangelizing the unchurched.¹

Although this poem is obviously a lighthearted and humorous look into the perception of what a perfect pastor looks like and does, it speaks volumes to what the real expectations are of many who sit today's church pews.

I was at a lay leadership conference recently and heard the presenter ask the group to share what they believed were the most important duties of their pastor. Given the various differences in gender, age and church size, the answers were not only very different, but extremely telling. Where some felt that good and effective preaching were the most important, others championed the ability to lead with administrative savvy. While some leaned toward visitation of the sick and shut-in as very important, others lifted the necessity of community visibility. Consistent office hours, home visits, multiple bible studies, board meetings, special services and accessibility, all made the list of what these lay leaders felt were the necessary duties of their pastor.

The purpose of the question that was posed was to get everyone to see (as they were listed) and hear (as they were spoken) the enormous expectations that we have for our pastors and the great lengths to which they must go to try to meet those expectations. The pastorate is a vocation like no other. But for the one who is always on call, continuously in preparation, consistently juggling and more-than-likely spent, it's all in a day's work.

II. Why Is Your Pastor's Anniversary So Important?

Sheep are known to respond to the voice of their shepherd. They understand that the shepherd will never bring them harm and that the provided guidance keeps them safe and moving forward to new pastures. There is not much thanks that a sheep can give besides gathering close to their shepherd. And, in essence, this is the point of a Pastor's Anniversary, for the congregation to gather and draw close, sharing its love the best way they know how.

A pastor's anniversary is important because it not only recognizes a pastor's years of service, but it also celebrates the experience, growth and progress of a church under a particular pastor's administration. Our pastors and spiritual leaders need the love, encouragement, and inspiration that can come from these celebrations.

III. Scriptures That Encourage Us to Show Pastors Appreciation

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 NRSV (Respect and highly esteem pastors.)

(v. 12) But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; (v. 13) esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

1 Timothy 5:17 NRSV (Give pastors double honor.)

(v. 17) Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

1 Corinthians 9:14 NRSV (Pay pastors.)

(v. 14) In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

IV. Scripture That Indicate Why We Should Show Pastors Appreciation

Colossians 2:1-5 NRSV (They encourage, struggle, teach and rejoice with us.)

(v. 1) For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. (v. 2) I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, (v. 3) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (v. 4) I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. (v. 5) For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Philippians 1:3-5, 7-11 NRSV (They pray for us and want what is best for us.)

(v. 3) I thank my God every time I remember you, (v. 4) constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, (v. 5) because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

(v. 7) It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. (v. 8) For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. (v. 9) And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight (v. 10) to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, (v. 11) having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

James 3:1 NRSV (They take teaching seriously.)

(v. 1) Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

2 Peter 3:17 NRSV (They want us to be grounded in Christ and the Word.)

(v. 17) You therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability.

V. Scriptures That Indicate How to Show Pastors Appreciation

Colossians 4:2-4 NRSV (Pray for pastors that they might carry the Word everywhere.)

(v. 2) Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. (v. 3) At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, (v. 4) so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.

Hebrews 13:18-19 NRSV (Pray that your pastor will act with integrity.)

(v. 18) Pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. (v. 19) I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you very soon.

Hebrews 13:7 NRSV (Imitate good pastors.)

(v. 7) Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

3 John 1:3-4 NRSV (Walk in the truth; live as if you have been taught the Word of God.)

(v. 3) I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. (v. 4) I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Hebrews 13:17 NRSV (Submit to pastoral leadership.)

(v. 17) Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing—for that would be harmful to you.

VI. Gift Ideas for a Pastor's Anniversary²

- An Appreciation plaque
- Gift certificate/card to his or her favorite shops or restaurants
- A monetary gift
- Mini-vacation (provide a weekend trip out of town)
- A Reception following the morning worship service
- A card shower
- An afternoon or evening social
- A bulletin board that includes your pastor's history at the church
- A surprise two week vacation

- Have each board/auxiliary do something special for the pastor
- Have a church appreciation banquet: Invite dignitaries and family to attend. Announce this special day in your local newspaper and through all social media. Get local government officials to recognize the event via proclamations.
- Have a testimony time during worship: Ex. How my pastor has touched my life.
- Have a special time of prayer during worship for the pastor where members can pray for the pastor's:
 - family, health, expanding ministry, sense of fulfillment, spiritual guidance
 - encouragement, patience, legacy, ministerial help, and strength.

Special Note:

If a pastor is married, his or her spouse is a helpmeet in all things relating to their mate. They are often an integral part of the support system, which works tirelessly behind the scenes, providing all things necessary to promoting a pastors' effective administration. There are ways to include them without diminishing the attention paid to the pastor. Here are a few ideas. You can do one or all of them:

- Present them with flowers or a Gift Basket;
- Present them with a congregational gift of appreciation for sharing the pastor with the church; and or
- Do a video presentation that highlights the key role that the spouse has played in the life of the church.

VII. It Is the Twenty First Century; Celebrate All of Your Pastors

While we should certainly celebrate Senior Pastors, it is also high time that we celebrate the other pastors of the church (the Assistant Pastor, Youth Pastor, Christian Education Pastor, Young Adult Pastor, Congregational Care Pastor, Executive Pastor/Minister, etc.). These are the people who work tirelessly to hold up the arms of the Senior Pastor. How often has a member of the pastoral staff been there representing the Senior Pastor so that the Senior Pastor would have time to study, pray, preach or teach? How often has a member of the pastoral staff come to the rescue of a member because the church size just would not permit the Senior Pastor to be all the places that he or she wanted to be when he or she wanted to be there?

More than ever, the roles that these typically trained persons play, greatly impact the work of the Church and the measure of its ministries. You may not want to mix the celebration of these key people with the celebration for the Senior Pastor, but they should definitely be honored. Rarely is the work of pastoring a one-man or one-woman show,

especially in those churches with significant ministry to communities. Let these diligent workers in the vineyard know that you know this by also setting aside a time to honor them and please be sure to do so in a tangible way. No, we cannot repay these members of the pastoral team for all that they do but we can certainly provide them with gestures of love that show that we understand and appreciate all that they do.

VIII. Songs for this Lectionary Moment

See today's worship unit for more than thirty (30) possible songs that are appropriate for a worship service during a Pastor's Anniversary.

Notes

1. "The Perfect Pastor." My-Pastor.com. Online location: <http://www.my-pastor.com/church-jokes.html> accessed 3 March 2010
2. Good Sites for Pastor Appreciation Ideas: Serenity. "Pastor Appreciation Event Successful." Online location: <http://www.pastor-appreciation.net/pastor-appreciation-event-successful.html> accessed 3 March 2010; "Pastor Appreciation Poems." My-Pastor.com. Online location: <http://www.my-pastor.com/pastor-appreciation-poems.html> accessed 3 March 2010; Pastor Appreciation Gifts.com. Online location: <http://www.pastorappreciationgifts.com/> accessed 3 March 2010