



The Relationship between Pastors and Associate Clergy

By Lawrence E. Mosley Jr.

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Through my time in ministry as an associate clergy, I have gleaned much from my experiences and from the guidance of my pastor. In ministry there are many things that need to happen to promote a healthy relationship between a pastor and his or her associate clergy. It takes a valiant effort by both to make the relationship flourish. It starts with a call from God for both, and it takes humility, prayer, fasting, and diligent studying of the Word of God.

Here are some other things that I have learned about this relationship. Pastors must not be too quick to put ministerial candidates in the pulpit or leave them without training. Too often ministers come into the pulpit with the wrong motivation for being in ministry, and they are poorly prepared for serving the church and the community. Furthermore, some associate clergy come with the wrong perception of ministry and even the wrong concept of God, thus the need for training.

Also, God is our resource. Warren W. Wiersbe states in his book On Being a Servant of God that “ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels to the Glory of God.”¹ This is important to the God-ordained success of the associate clergy. He

or she must know that God is the divine resource of all that we are and all that we have. If God is not the divine resource to which we look and about which we teach, then our ministerial work should cease! Additionally, associate clergy must know that since God is the resource, what we do is not for our glory but for God's glory.

Next, associate clergy must be loving channels who look to meet the needs of others. Ministry is a call to serve others, not yourself, your ambitions, or your ego. Paul states in 1 Timothy 1:4-7:

Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees.

These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God. The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith. But some people have missed this whole point. They have turned away from these things and spend their time in meaningless discussions. They want to be known as teachers of the Law of Moses, but they don't know what they are talking about, even though they speak so confidently.

Paul's purpose is to aid in believers being filled with love that comes from a pure heart, clear conscience, and genuine faith. This too should be the role of the associate clergy and should be emphasized by the senior pastor. Love, a pure hear, clear conscience, and genuine faith should be manifested in the life of an aspiring associate clergy before hands are laid on him or her for ministry. Along with having these characteristics, a pastor must be adamant that his or her associate clergy live ethical and transparent lives.

Associate clergy must also be taught what it means to be righteous ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 it states:

This is a trustworthy saying: “If someone aspires to be an elder, he desires an honorable position.” So an elder must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach. He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money. He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? An elder must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall. Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil’s trap.

It is true that teaching these attributes of character, which build upon an already existing Christian foundation, takes time and effort; however, what must be realized is that pastors are equipping the church of tomorrow, today. So it must be the mandate of each pastor to properly rear his or her spiritual children. By rear I mean that a pastor must mentor and train to the best of his or her God-given abilities. Also quite importantly, pastors are not to be intimidated by the gifts and talents of the associate clergy, nor are they to seek to sabotage them in any way.

I have also learned that in mentoring and training associate clergy, pastors must be willing to correct when necessary any behavior that is not beneficial for Kingdom building and to guard against any unhealthy competition among the associate clergy. This includes not tolerating immoral life styles and instilling a Kingdom-first mindset must be a priority. Proverbs 3:5-6 states, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” Trusting in God is the initial step to having a Kingdom mindset. The key words for the pastor–associate clergy relationship in

this text are trust, lean not, and acknowledge. “Trust” in this instance is dependence on the character, strength, and love of God. “Lean not” simply means that we cannot rely on our own power and resources for support or inspiration. To “acknowledge” is to recognize the rights, authority, or status of God as Savior and Lord. These are all important if one is a pastor or an associate clergy and of signal importance in the healthy development of a relationship between the two.

The pastor and the associate clergy grow together by first truly knowing God. Knowledge of God is a must; only then will we be able to put our trust in God. We cannot emulate someone we don’t know, and we cannot tell the unsaved about someone we know nothing about. The more we learn about and emulate God, the better we will be in living for and introducing others to God.

Another key theme found in this passage is humility, which is having a spirit of submission and meekness, enduring trials with patience and without resentment. Pastors and associate clergy must have a spirit of humility and meekness when it comes to God, with each other, and in all relationships.

Next in this relationship the associate clergy must be taught to always strive to be an ethical person and to exercise ethical conduct. The ethics of conduct is the moral obligation to do what is right according to Scripture, regardless of the outcome. This is seen in Jesus and should be reinforced and emulated by the pastor. The associate clergy must be taught and must understand the importance of the four cardinal virtues that are all found in Jesus the Christ and three theological virtues that are virtues and gifts from God. The four cardinal virtues are prudence (practical wisdom), temperance/self control, justice (giving to each what is due them), and courage (willingness to suffer for the good). The three theological virtues are faith, hope, and

love. Ministerial ethics should be strongly enforced. Associate clergy need these virtues to be equipped for ministry anywhere, including if called by God to a pastorate.

Further, pastors should not tolerate potential or existing clergy who carry themselves in the ways of Absalom. Absalom was King David's son. He was rebellious and tried to lead a rebellion against his father that was not successful. There are spiritual sons and daughters who will rebel and lead rebellions against their spiritual parents. This is not a Kingdom-first mindset! It is the associate clergy's responsibility to observe, listen to, respect, and protect their spiritual parents, not hurt and rebel against them.

To sum up, it is the Pastor's duty to guide, teach, and rear the associate clergy. The pastor must constantly teach that the Bible holds the keys to right living. Micah 6:8 states that those keys are to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. Also, pastors must not be quick to put ministerial candidates in the pulpit, no matter who they are or what their gifts may be. They should also strongly emphasize that "that ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels to the Glory of God."² Pastors must also stress that associate clergy should strive to be pure in heart, have a clear conscience, and have genuine faith. Additionally, they must be firm that their associate clergy live ethical and transparent lives all the time, not just on Sundays. Finally, the spirit of Absalom should not be entertained. The relationship between pastor and associate clergy should always be a joy and a pleasure as both grow in God doing the will of God to meet the needs of God's people, all to the glory of God.

Notes

1. Wiersbe, Warren W. On Being a Servant of God. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007.
2. Ibid.