

Most preachers' kids reject church, informal survey reveals_32204

March 19, 2004

Posted: 3/19/04

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DALLAS—The image of the pastor's kid turning wild may not be that far off base.

Although little research has been done about the spirituality of pastors' children, a recent informal survey of a small group of Texas Baptist pastors by Dennis Parrott, director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Bible Study/Discipleship Center, found 80 percent of pastors' kids no longer are connected to the church.

Many pastors' children are turned off by the way church members treat their parents, Parrott said.

Young people see the anger and conflict that can arise in congregations, he noted. They view the hypocrisy.□

“They saw the whole experience as bad,” Parrott said. “They don't see the lifestyle as for them.”

Pastors' children often are under a lot of pressure, said Margaret Myers, a consultant in the BGCT minister/church relations office who works with ministers' children.

They feel they are disgracing the family and church if they are not perfect, she said.

“Trying to live up to everyone's expectations is difficult,” she said.

“Especially in smaller churches, the pastor's family is put on a pedestal, and everyone watches.”

Ministers' children also believe the church is stealing time with their father, said Myers, a pastor's child.

Pastors typically work 50-hour weeks, leaving a child fighting for attention, she noted. Family vacations can be cut short because of events at the church.

Watching a parent being fired can be especially painful for children, Myers indicated.

It is not unusual for children to move as many as five times. They understand finances become tighter. They know stress is heightened. They also face moving and having to make new friends.

“The children are smart enough to know that mom's under stress and dad's under stress, so they don't want to add stress,” she said.

But children have no one to turn to, Myers found. They are afraid to talk to people in the congregation. They do not think their friends understand their situation.

These issues are part of Satan's strategy against the church, according to Myers.

This type of setting and pressure plays to the natural rebelliousness of teenagers, she added.

Ministers and their families are prime targets to attack, she said. If the family is lacking, some may think the faith is as well.

When ministers' children leave the faith, the church loses future leaders, Myers said. They naturally absorb leadership skills from their parents as they mature.

To counter this situation, she encourages pastors to schedule time for their families and children that congregations cannot interrupt.

Even one night a week means a great deal to youth, Myers observed.

"Kids just want time," she said. "They want time with dad, especially. They want to hear the words 'I love you' and 'I'm proud of you.' They want to see dad at events that are important to them. This shows that dad sees them as a priority.

"It's also important for the church to give ministers permission to put family first. The church must realize the important role they play in the success of the ministers' family."

Parrott urges pastors to cushion tough times for their children.

Parents must protect their kids, he said. Give them honest information, but be conscious of the image of the faith that is painted.

"Churches aren't always going to be nice to us," he said.

"Don't tell your kids about it. Don't vent on them."

Myers hopes to develop a mentoring system where younger pastors' children share issues with grown pastors' children.

The mentors would work closely with parents as well, encouraging them along the way.

Above all, parents cannot give up on their children, Myers said. Some come back to the faith as they grow older, she added.

Keep being a faithful example, and continue sharing the faith, she urged.

But in the end, adults must let their children choose their path, she acknowledged.

“I really believe the parents are good parents who are doing their best to raise children who love God, love the church and love who they are,” she said.

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