

Ten suggestions for welcoming a new pastor

May 18, 2022

Welcoming a new pastor is an exciting time for both the congregation and the minister. To maximize this new beginning, it is important to prepare spiritually, cognitively and emotionally for a new chapter.

Once a call to a new pastor is confirmed, there are a few things you can do personally and congregationally to prepare to follow a new spiritual leader:

1. Pray for your new pastor.

In most of the churches I know, members pray for the pastor search team throughout the search process, and they pray for the pastor even before they know the identity of their new minister. They also pray for their new pastor in the pastor's inaugural days of ministry.

However, I suggest making a commitment to pray daily for your pastor throughout the duration of his or her ministry. Once the "honeymoon period" is over and the daily grind of ministry begins, praying for your pastor will strengthen your pastor's ministry and will fortify your bond with your pastor.

2. Send your pastor a welcome note or email.

Be careful not to make this correspondence a lengthy epistle, and certainly don't make it a diatribe itemizing your personal expectations or agenda. Just offer a brief note, introducing yourself and/or family, and offering a heartfelt welcome.

When I moved to my last pastorate, I received over a hundred such notes, which confirmed and intensified my excitement about my new place of

service.

3. Mention your name on your first several encounters with your new pastor.

Once your new pastor arrives, make sure to offer your name in each greeting for the first few weeks. Learning names is important for pastors.

Be sure not to embarrass the pastor by quizzing, “Do you remember my name?”

Give your pastor the opportunity to learn your name and, over time, to learn a part of your life story.

4. Embrace the uniqueness of your pastor.

Your pastor has a distinct personality, a unique set of spiritual gifts and a diverse set of experiences.

When the Spirit leads a church to a new pastor, the Spirit seldom leads a church or committee to a person just like the previous pastor or the beloved pastor from the church’s history. To compare your new pastor to any other is to disrespect the Spirit’s role in guiding you to your new pastor in the first place.

5. Be prepared to follow.

A pastor who is worth his or her salt must lead in both optimal and challenging situations. And the kingdom of God is enriched when we as a congregation follow our pastor and embrace our mission with enthusiasm.

As a veteran pastor, I am quite aware there is a small minority of pastors who are “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” whose motives are deceptive and whose methods are manipulative. They need to be held accountable.

However, the vast majority of pastor’s I know provide Spirit-led, mission-

focused and proactive leadership.

Don't be a backseat driver. Serve with your best gifts.

6. Encourage your congregation to provide a coach for your pastor for the first [100 days](#) or longer.

The first 100 days of a new pastorate are a precious resource that should be spent by the pastor and the congregation thoughtfully and carefully. Inviting a coach to guide this process is a worthwhile investment of resources and time.

The intent is to engage proactively a series of opportunities and key people. Without a thoughtful plan, the pressing agendas and needs of the church and people will crowd out the less urgent but very important agenda deserving attention.

Although I had several years of pastoral experience, I hired a coach a few years ago to help sharpen and update my leadership skills. I only wish I had retained a coach earlier in my ministry. The Center for Healthy Churches can assist your church in providing a leadership coach for your pastor during his or her first 100 days.

7. Be attentive to caring for the pastor's family during the transition and afterward.

You are not just calling a pastor; you are calling a pastor's family. Moving is difficult for everyone, but it is perhaps even more challenging for a pastor's family.

Sometimes the children and spouse stay behind to complete the school year. Often, the pastor's family must live in temporary housing before they find a permanent home.

It is especially challenging for a pastor's children to leave their friends

behind and move to a new school and church. It also is difficult for a pastor's spouse to transfer to a new community, a new social network and possibly even a new place of employment.

While your church is excited about welcoming a new pastor, keep in mind your new pastor and family are going to be dealing with the grief of departure, even as they are trying to embrace the excitement of a new beginning. These emotions are tough to balance.

8. If your new pastor moved during the pandemic, provide an opportunity for your church and community to meet the pastor's family in person.

During the past two years, quite a few churches have proceeded to call pastors by video. A few of those pastors preached only via livestream for their first several months. Others met a few members in-person and look forward to meeting other members of the church family.

Unusual circumstances call for radical creativity. Once it is reasonably safe to do so, plan a picnic, a reception or some other fun event to welcome the pastor and family even if they have been on the field for several months.

A Zoom introduction just isn't the same as a face-to-face welcome.

9. Give your pastor permission to fail.

The best pastors don't succeed 100 percent of the time. And as churches and pastors adapt to ministry in the post-pandemic world, there will be a higher degree of trial and error than there was in the pre-pandemic era.

A few weeks into one of my pastoral assignments, a sincere church member said to me: "I am glad you're here. Every pastor I have had has disappointed me. I hope you never disappoint me."

I quickly countered: "Let me just disappoint you right now and get it out of

the way. Like you, I am an imperfect human being who will make mistakes. But if we forgive one another as God has forgiven us, we will get along just fine.”

I must admit, I think my response disappointed this well-intentioned member. Don’t hold your pastor to a standard of perfection that is impossible to maintain. Allow your minister room to make mistakes.

10. Speak positively about your pastor publicly and privately.

One of the ways we bring out the best in our ministers is to speak well of them publicly and privately. With most pastors, it is easy to find something to criticize, because every minister has weaknesses: “He is too loud.” “She is too soft-spoken.” “He uses big words I don’t understand.” “She is not a people person.”

However, every pastor has more strengths than weaknesses. A healthy pastoral tenure is nurtured when we magnify our pastor’s strengths, and then minimize and compensate for our pastor’s weaknesses.

As church members, we are privileged to co-labor with our pastor in the transformative work of demonstrating grace, sharing the good news and equipping disciples.

Barry Howard is pastor of the Church at Wieuca in North Atlanta, Ga., and a leadership coach with the Center for Healthy Churches. This article is adapted and republished by permission from the [Center for Healthy Churches blog](#).