

Ten Indisputable Guidelines for New Pastors

By Jim Fuller

During the summer months, some Bible college and seminary graduates are starting your first full-time ministries. Other pastors have made a summer move and are just getting your feet wet at a new assignment.

If you have just unpacked the U-Haul and are getting started at a local church ministry, here are ten indisputable guidelines to help you get your new ministry off to a good start.

1. Consider yourself a pastor-in-training: As new pastors quickly discover, there is so much about the local church ministry that can't be taught in the classroom. A healthy attitude is to view your first ten years as on-the-job training as you prepare for a lifetime as a pastor.

In other words, keep it humble. Expect to make mistakes. It is illogical to be an immediate expert on all things. Accept criticism and learn from it. Keep learning by attending conferences and reading books. Now that you are in the ministry, the real learning begins.

2. Have a mentor: You need someone with experience to help you work through the countless questions and challenges you face. Your childhood pastor. A Bible college professor. A local pastor from another denomination. Someone you can talk to honestly who will give you good advice, as well as an occasional pep talk.

3. Clarify expectations: One common reason pastors get discouraged is that the ministry is not what they expected. Meanwhile, one common complaint church members have is that the new pastor is different than what they think a minister should be.

However, mistakes are made when neither the pastor nor the congregation calmly express their expectations to each other! Negotiate your expectations honestly. And be all ears to the comments of your members. What does what they are saying reveal about their expectations? What issues need to be clarified?

4. Don't be too quick to make changes: When a new pastor attempts big changes too quickly, it comes across as arrogant and self-centered. Of course, your church needs changes; every church does. But how do you already know what changes are most needed before you even really know your church, your people, and your community? Many members will understandably ask why their church's newest member -- you! -- thinks everything should be immediately changed to your liking.

Follow the “one-year rule”: Spend your first-year learning, listening, building relationships, and gaining trust.

5. Take a long-term view. (Be patient!): The simple fact is that more than half of all churches are not experiencing significant growth. So don't beat yourself up if you do not achieve overnight success. Give it time. Have a long-term perspective. I am not saying to not be ambitious, to not have great goals or pray big prayers. But if all your goals and prayers are not fulfilled quickly, don't get frustrated. “Everything worth doing takes time.”



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While moving the new pastor into his office, the deacons voted to call an emergency meeting.

And don't be obsessed with the numbers. You can't ignore them completely; that's not realistic. But don't be dominated by them, either. If you are a dieter, treat your attendance numbers like you do your weight -- weigh periodically to see if you are making any progress, but in between weighing, keep your focus on being healthy and doing the right things.

6. Embrace the community: If you have relocated from one region to another or have moved into a small town, one thing you may have to contend with is being an “outsider.” The sooner you embrace your new community and become part of it, the sooner your people will accept you.

Learn what is good about your new home. Find something about it you sincerely like. Talk to the Chamber of Commerce. Get out and get involved. Learn the music and the sports and the schools. Become one of the locals.

7. Value people of all ages: Some young ministers fail to recognize the great value of older members. However, as the national population grows older, the church is having more difficult than ever attracting younger members. Many churches literally cannot survive without their older members. If you are a young pastor, one of the first questions many older members will wonder is whether you respect and value them. What is your answer to them?

Besides, it is unbiblical to be disrespectful of older people, and ungodly to show favoritism to any group of the church family. Your calling is to shepherd God's entire family, from the grandkids to the grandparents and everyone in between.

8. Remember that this is a big adjustment for your spouse, too: If this is your first time as a full-time pastor, then it is probably your spouse's first time as a minister's wife or husband. Don't be so caught up in everything you are dealing with that you forget that your spouse is experiencing a big adjustment, too! Here are some good resources from our website: [The role of a pastor's wife](#); [The role of a pastor's husband](#).

9. Get and keep your finances in order: Being a new minister is tremendously stressful. Having financial problems greatly elevates the stress level. Make up your mind to get your finances in order and keep them that way from day one. Create a budget, Master the unique tax laws that relate to ministers, and make sure you take full advantage of parsonage allowance, expense allowances, etc. Check out Pastoral Care's free, 14-page downloadable booklet: "[Compensation Planning for Ministers](#)."

10. Preach good sermons: This is last on the list but first in importance. Don't get so caught up in church projects and politics that you neglect your first calling: to preach the Word.

Very few members will ever boast: "My pastor is an outstanding project manager," or "My pastor is so clever at church politics," or "My pastor is a whiz when it comes to modern technology." What every church member wants to be able to say is: "My pastor is a great preacher. Every week I am challenged and inspired by the pastor's great sermons."

The Jerusalem church "continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42), and the apostles refused to allow themselves to be distracted from "the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4). Every pastor's first calling is to "Preach the word ... reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim 4:2). Do that and your best members will love you, and God will bless and reward you.

WISE WORDS ON . . . *Being a Young/New Pastor*

All Scriptures from the NASV unless otherwise noted.

On his second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul led Timothy to Christ and then trained him in ministry. Later, Paul appointed Timothy to oversee the church in Ephesus. Timothy was in his 30s or 40s during his ministry at Ephesus. Paul referred to Timothy's youthfulness (1 Tim 4:12), which may refer not only to Timothy's age but his inexperience in Christian ministry. Paul wrote 1 & 2 Timothy to advise and encourage Timothy in his ministry. These are excellent Scriptures for all pastors, especially younger and newer ministers.

Have confidence

• 1 Tim 4:12: "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe."

Stay true to your calling

• 2 Tim 1:6-7: "Kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."

- 1 Tim 4:14: "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."
- 2 Tim 4:5: "Be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

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*"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God
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ashamed,
accurately handling the word of truth."*

2 Timothy 2:15

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Stay founded and focused on God's Word

- 2 Tim 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."
- 2 Tim 1:13-14: "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you."
- 2 Tim 3:14-17: "Continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Keep on learning and persevering

- 1 Tim 4:15-16: "Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. 16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."

Respect your older members

- 1 Tim 5:1-2: "Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, 2 the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters."

Avoid arguments and quarrels

- 2 Tim 2:23-25: "Refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. 24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition."

Stay pure and righteous

- 2 Tim 2:22: "Flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

- 1 Tim 6:11-14: "Flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ... 14 ... keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Be content with your finances

- 1 Tim 6:6-10: "But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Be willing to suffer, sacrifice

- 2 Tim 2:3-4: "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."

- 2 Tim 1:8-9: "Join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."

- 2 Tim 4:7-8: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day."

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