

More Ideas for Loving Your Pastor from Jane Rubietta, author of *How to Keep the Pastor You Love*

Encouraging Your Incoming Minister

The Lord promises to watch over our comings and goings—and consistently seems to do that through people in the local church. Here are some ways.

Clean thoroughly, paint, repair—before the pastor moves in. One man, new to his church, volunteered to spruce up the inside. “There were miles of cracks in the walls. I wouldn’t let my family live here.” Ask the pastor-family’s preference for paint, wallpaper, carpeting if it’s being replaced. Does it have to be ubiquitous brown? Find out their needs—do they need a wall put up for another bedroom? Will the walls work color-wise? Will they need shelves for office space? One church divided part of the basement into an office and a fourth bedroom to accommodate our family.

Our doorbell rang for a month as church members brought “Pleased to meet you” gifts our way. Raspberries, honey, our first sampling of Norwegian Kringla, homemade jam. . . . Millie gave us a cooler loaded with home-fried chicken, potato salad, bread, carrots, dessert and soda pop to ease the first couple of days in the new place.

Chuck arrived at the door with an armful of tomato plants. He proceeded into the back yard and buried the roots, sprinkling the young leaves with white flour to keep the bugs away.

Offers to babysit are greatly appreciated at this busy time.

Building Up Your Pastor’s Marriage

Pray. Ask for specific prayer requests for the pastor’s marriage and hold those faithfully before God. Keep them confidential. Pray with the pastor, one on one, as well as on your own. (Because spiritual intimacy is the most intimate of all forms of closeness, I would suggest praying aloud with your pastor if you are the same sex; or praying aloud as couples. This sort of sharing between a man and a woman can quickly become dangerous.)

Praise. Someone said the greatest human need is the need to be appreciated. Pastors and their spouses need to hear what you appreciate about them and about their partners. And don’t put one of them in the middle by complaining to them about their spouse.

Promise.

- To be a friend
- To listen closely
- To hold one another accountable
- To be honest about your own problems

Put their anniversary on the church calendar. Give the pastor the day—and night—off

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even if it's Sunday, or the monthly kamikaze every-committee-in-church-meets-tonight day.

Remember the anniversary and half-anniversary (like the half-birthday) with a gift. A card shower is thoughtful, but since most people just sign their names to the card and don't write anything, how about a special collection?

If the clergy couple has kids, volunteer once a month to appear at the house, feed and bathe children and put them to bed so the couple can head off on an extended date night—or overnight.

Collect frequent flier miles and donate the miles to the couple for a splurge. Include certificates for food and lodging, so the getaway is a total gift.

Tell the pastor and spouse they never have to bring a dish to pass to the church potluck. Send staff couples to a conference or retreat, paying the way for both pastor and spouse, so they can grow together and be refreshed together. Include this in the church budget, and allow for food, rental car and so on.

Send them on a marriage retreat for clergy couples. If they have children, take care of all babysitting arrangements logistically and financially.

Create a fine dining experience in your own home, where the pastor and spouse are not expected to even have conversation with you. Pretend you are the wait staff and attend to every need, including candlelight and soft music, appetizers and dessert.

Meet together as couples, study a book together, attend a conference together, hold one another accountable to growth, honesty and vitality in marriage.

Advice from the Pastor's Spouse: Deactivating Expectations

Here are some words of wisdom gathered from pastor's spouses regarding how to treat the pastor.

“Let them be themselves and plug into areas at church based on their gifts, just like any other lay persons.”

“Expect the same of them as of any other church member.”

“Recognize their special stresses as people married to ministers. Then tune into those needs like you would anyone.”

“Accept them for who they are, not so they can start or run programs.”

“Pray for them, with them.”

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“Expect them to have needs, everyday aches and pains, good days and bad moments.”

“Be the body of Christ for them, just as they are for you.”

Advantages to Growing Up PK

(Not necessarily in order of importance—although that depends on whose order!):

“When asking for money donations for church retreats or youth conferences I get a lot because no one can say no to a pastor’s daughter. I also get some respect from adults.”

Erika, 14

“You meet many new people. You get more knowledge of Biblical issues. Family generally lives for God.” Debbie, 19

“Not everyone at church knows who you are so you can go into the ladies’ bathroom after he preaches and listen to what the people say about your dad and then tell him.” Courtney,

14

“Don’t have to sit with my parents in church.” Benjamin, 15

“You learn about Christ very young. So you can tell others sooner about Christ.” Brenda, 11

“You needed no introduction. Everybody knew you. People didn’t swear or drink around you. They were usually on their best behavior. People knew your address.” Linda, 50

“Lots of missionaries and even the Bishop came to visit. It gave us a broader perspective, and it also took (important visitors) off their pedestals.” Julie, 28

“We got to meet all the Chicago Bull’s players.” Courtney, 14

“How many kids meet everybody at their parents’ work? Many kids interact with adults only when they become adults. The pastorate makes you more mature.” Marissa, 36

“Good potlucks, going to people’s homes for dinner, visiting people’s farms. I learned a lot about Dad through the pulpit. He always had an answer but didn’t push me.” Dave, 45

“We learned how to budget money. I went grocery shopping with my dad in the summer; he taught me how to shop.” Karen, 28

“Going to church every Sunday was an advantage. It was cool that Dad was in the pulpit. I didn’t have to wait until Sunday school if I had questions about Christianity.” Lisa, 29

“Back then, PKs got in movies for free. I enjoyed church camps. Parents trusted me as dates

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for their daughters.” Bob, 60

Disadvantages to Growing Up PK

Telephone disrupts family time

Husband never sits with family during worship

Uncertain tenure at church

Overexposure to failures of Christians

See everyone’s warts

Always have to *be there*

Lack of spontaneity on weekends

Sunday is never a relaxing day

Time pressure limits opportunity for family events

Always being watched

Family is supposed to “have it all together”

(Advantages and disadvantages are compiled from Marshall Shelley, *Healthy Hectic Home* [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988], pp. 37-38.)

Caring for the Pastor’s Family

Honor the pastor’s days off and meal times. Respect the family’s need for time as a unit.

Church holidays are particularly busy (read: insane) for pastors. Ask how you can minister to the family during high-stress times.

Take the kids to the fair, water park or theme park.

When a festival comes to town, spare change is scarce in many pastoral pockets. A few green dollars would mean the world to a PK and the parent!

Gift certificates—to kids’ stores, or to a fast food place—give kids a sense of independence with “money” that doesn’t hurt a tight family budget.

Can you get extra tickets through work for pro sports? I know a kid (and a mom or dad) who

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would like to go with you!

After finding out special talents, consider a gift certificate to a park district program or to a local studio offering lessons in each child's interest.

Ever consider a season's pass to the local swimming pool? Better yet, take the kids to the pool occasionally.

How about "send a kid to camp"? What about church camp, basketball camp, cheerleading, hockey, computer, fine arts camp?

"Not receiving an allowance" appeared on surveys as one downside of being a PK. Odd jobs that the PK could do for you can also teach many lessons. Build relationships as well as spruce up and clean up.

Could you share your favorite hobby with the minister's child? Whether doll making or woodworking, car repairs or fish ponds, French cuisine or darning socks (certainly a dying art!) . . .

Becoming Family for the Minister's Kids

Offer to shuttle a child to a practice or lesson.

Plan a regular time when the children come to your home, or take them on an outing. Visit a buffalo farm, go out for ice cream . . .

Cheer for them at games, Christmas programs, dance recitals. Affirm them for their gifts and ministries; this separates the child's offerings from the pastor's job.

Do you have a little cabin in the woods? Or a time-sharing option for vacation?

Give the kids a call just to see how they're doing.

Ask for school pictures and display them.

Get down on their level at church and really listen to them.

Offer crisis comfort: chocolate covered doughnuts, loving arms, comics, a new book by a favorite author, holding a hand.

More Ideas for Helping Your Pastor at Home

No yellow pages. Respect the sanctity and privacy of the pastor's home. Do not list the pastor's home phone number under the church listing in the phone book! Churches have answering machines and pagers and e-mail—and pastors can retrieve the data when

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necessary and convenient.

Give permission to screen calls at home. Put Caller ID on the pastor's home phone.

Limit night meetings. Primary connection time for most relationships, pastors included, is evening. Some churches place all meetings on one evening of the week. Hold your pastor to one evening for meetings, two for studies and calling, and the rest for home time. Do the same for your own family! Everyone wins then.

Limit extra weekend involvement. Consider requiring the pastor to attend only a certain number of functions per week and month.

Respect prime time. Do not call your pastor at home after 6:00 p.m. or with questions that could be answered by someone at or from church.

Read the bulletin. Many calls to the pastor home could be avoided if people just read Sunday's announcements. "Where is the youth group meeting?" "What day is the cookout?" "Is the committee meeting tonight?"

Break the unwritten rules. Create a five-day workweek in the job description.

Institute comp time. (Pastors from a variety of denominations suggested this one!)

Ways to Love Through Giving

Jayne, a licensed beautician, gave her pastor's family free hair care.

Antonio owned a lawn service and donated complete lawn care to the minister.

Babysitting is expensive—unless you're the one providing it.

Harry showed up at our door with fresh broccoli—just as I was digging in the fridge for something safely green to balance our kids' meal.

What about bulbs from your garden when you divide them in the fall, or starts from your perennials?

Have you electrical skill or other technical expertise? Jerry wired a new parsonage at no cost. Mark and Tim replaced all the knob and tube wiring at their minister's home, and the homeowner's insurance decreased.

What about computer expertise?

Randy discounted the labor on clergy car repairs.

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Louise, a PK from the old school, gave the young pastor's family first pick at the church rummage sale—at no charge.

Dee stopped by the bakery weekly, dropping off her goodies at the parsonage.

Ted loved coupons and donated half of his “Buy One, Get One Free” deals to the pastor.

Louise tithed on her garage sale—and gave it directly to the minister for family fun.

Encouragement During a Move: Creating Memories for the Pastor's Children

Before the Move

Create a “here's what I like about you” list.

Find out the kids' “favorite things”—favorite pizza, museum, park—and make some time once a week to treat them to those things.

A camera, film, photo album and a coupon for film developing make a good memory gift.

An autograph-address book will be a priceless personal possession for a lonely child in a new place.

How about hosting a scrapbook party?

En Route

A carry bag of fun things to eat and to do on the trip—a special book, travel games, batteries for those infernal hand-held beeping games . . .

Eat-out-en-route fast food certificates relieve ministry-parents, who may not have the money to buy easy food along the way and must pack lots of sandwiches and so forth amidst the mayhem of moving.

For those long-distance moves, staying in a hotel can be a huge expense. What about a gift certificate at a Fun-Dome type of hotel? By including money for meals while there, the giver attains hero-status in the eyes of all concerned!

After the Move

Gather letters from close friends and have a packet awaiting the children at the new house (or a few days after arriving). Our kids received big envelopes from former classmates; they were thrilled. I cried.

A phone card with a list of significant numbers means connection and some independence for children thrust into a new setting without many options.

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Pre-addressed, stamped postcards make communication easy. But if the kids (or parents) don't fill them out and send them, be gracious. It's so hard in a new place to find the way through the mire of boxes and feelings and new routines.

Video clips (of groups, events, friends, the church) let the entire family reminisce together in the next home.

Check the Internet for fun things in the new place. What about ordering tickets to the ice rink or a gift certificate to the hottest pizza place or . . .

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