

So you want to hire a Pastor?

I was once counseling a man whom I'd met in an AA meeting that took place in the gymnasium of the local church in which I was serving as pastor. He would frequently call me for advice in navigating the custody and visitation issues that would arise regularly, between him and his ex-wife.

One day, on the phone with me, he was running the ex-wife down terribly. When he paused to take a breath, I asked him the following question...

"Let's assume for a moment that an angel has just come down from Heaven, and has struck your ex-wife with 'the perfect stick'. Suddenly, she has become the perfect wife, the perfect mother, the perfect friend and the perfect person".

"Wow", says he. "That would be great!"

"So I ask you", I continued. "If she suddenly became perfect, what in the world would she want with your sorry mess?!?"

If your church found the perfect pastor, what makes you think he'd want to come there and serve?

Yes, the pastor is the one whose qualifications are to be examined; but the church's qualifications are to be examined as well; and will be, by the savvy, qualified candidate.

Does the church have a structure in which the pastor can live out his calling, or will he be "forced" into a mold by people who - rather than have God lead them where He wants them to go - want to hear and see what makes them comfortable, and be served as they so choose, for the price of their offerings? Churches have an obligation to the Kingdom of God and to the man of God who serves there, to be decent and in order in the way in which they interact with, and even choose their pastor.

This raises several issues. First is the issue about whom the pastor works for. Are you aware that while pastors may be considered "common law employees" for federal income tax purposes, in most cases, pastors are considered independent contractors for federal income tax purposes? And for Social Security purposes, pastors are *always* considered contract employees. Even if the church does the minister the courtesy of withholding taxes for them, and even contributing to the social security taxes, the pastor is ultimately responsible for his own taxes. Why is this?

It is because everyone knows - even the government - that the pastor works for God, and not as a hired hand for a local church. He may acquiesce to a particular local calling, but not to be an employee, a hired gun, or a *do-what-you're-told* servant of that church. Rather he is there to serve out his Calling in God's Kingdom, in that local vineyard, feeding, leading and caring for the sheep of that pasture. Of course, this is speaking of the person with the Calling of Pastor; what some may call, being in possession of the "ascension gift" of Pastor.

*Therefore He says, "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men." (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same also as He who ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) And truly He gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and*

*some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. And this until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we no longer may be infants, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, in the dishonesty of men, in cunning craftiness, to the wiles of deceit. Eph 4:8-14*

The next great issue raised is this... If the church wants a man with a Pastoral Calling, it/they should be prepared to follow that Pastor's lead... recognizing that he has a Calling to lead, that they've called him so that they can follow that lead, and because they have come to believe in him and want to follow his lead.

If on the other hand, the church merely wants a pastor to fill a clearly defined pastoral role, then they ought to be scrupulously honest about informing that man that he is being hired to fill a pastoral role, and to provide some things that only a pastor can... but he is not being called to exercise his own Pastoral Calling in that church location.

In my ministry with young people, I have often taken opportunity to talk to them about the goal of most young people... finding the right mate. I have told many of them individually, and all of them collectively, the following. *"If you want the right person, pay far less attention to finding him or her, than to being him or her. In other words, concentrate on being the kind of person that the right kind of person would want to be with."*

I offer no different advice to churches in search of pastors. Reading a book on pastoral selection is a good thing. Creating a checklist of pastoral "desirables" is a good thing. Being a church where that desirable Pastor would want to serve is a better thing.

If the church recognizes that it needs assistance in becoming that organization/institution/family where a quality Pastor would want to be called and to serve, then it ought to find the man who can lead it to that point, and follow him. Even if he never becomes their "Pastor", perhaps never quite fitting into the "desirable" box, the church will be well served by working at getting to the place where "Mr. Right" will want to serve.

Pastor