**Pastor and Minister Recognition and Appreciation**

God’s Word commands us to show love, support, and appreciation for faithful pastors and ministers as our spiritual leaders. In I Thessalonians 5:12-13, Paul said, “*Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work*.” Paul also noted in I Timothy 5:17, “*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching*.” The writer of the book of Hebrews instructed in Hebrews 13:17, “*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you*.”

Appreciation, affirmation, and recognition is very important to all of us as human beings. Actions of appreciation are simple to do, but such actions are powerful and meaningful to the recipients. But yet, we often take our pastors, ministers and spiritual leaders for granted and forget to simply express our thanks, love, and support to them for their faithful service. Such dedicated pastors and ministers deserve and need recognition and appreciation from the people and churches they serve. This is especially true in times like we have faced recently, where the new challenges and uncertainties of the pandemic and the turmoil of society have been demanding and draining on ministers as they navigate through these difficult trials.

October has been designated as “Pastor/Minister Appreciation Month” and provides churches a great opportunity to express their thanks and appreciation to ministers for their faithful service and the blessed impact they have had on the lives and eternities of people in the church and community. Your simple actions and words of recognition and appreciation will powerfully bless and encourage your ministers and their families, and help to inspire them to even greater service in the future. Even though October is designated as a special month for this activity, do not simply wait until this time to express your love and support. Make that activity a consistent part of your interactions with your ministers. Satan attacks ministers with discouragements and criticisms, and the words and actions of those who instead choose to be a Barnabus—“son of encouragement’—are a tremendous help and blessing to ministers’ lives and ministry.

Church leadership—deacons, elders, church councils, leadership teams, personnel committees/teams—usually initiate the discussion, actions, and plans for pastor/minister recognition activities. Some churches have standing guidelines in their personnel policies to ensure that they recognize and celebrate their pastors and ministers on a regular basis. If there are not clear instructions about the pastor/minister appreciation process in your church, you be the person who approaches your leadership soon with the conviction and idea to recognize and celebrate the ministers in your church. Also, consider recognizing the ministry assistants, support staff, and employees of the church, as well as the retired ministers, emeritus pastors, missionaries, and vocational Christian servants who may be members of your church family.

Once the commitment has been made to do a special recognition moment for your pastor/minister, choose a date and time that is best for your church and the ministers involved. This may be a date in the month of October, or this could be done in conjunction with other events like:

* The pastor/minister service anniversary date at the church.
* Celebrations of a significant number of years of service by the pastor/minister (5 years, 10 years, 20 years, etc.)
* The birthday of the pastor/minister.
* At the moment of significant milestones and accomplishments in the life or ministry of the pastor/minister.
* Special moments deemed appropriate by the church.

Church leadership will then need to decide the day and format of the recognition moment. Churches can do the recognition as a special part of a Sunday worship service, during a church fellowship event connected to a Sunday worship service, or during a banquet event sometime during the week or weekend. Remember to invite the family members and special friends of the pastor/minister to the event, as well as possibly representatives of the Baptist association and denomination, and community members and representatives to join in the moment of recognition and appreciation. Events on Sundays connected to a worship service will probably have a greater attendance and more participation from your church family.

The church leadership must then decide how to recognize the pastor and minister in this appreciation and recognition moment. Those planning the event should seek input from individuals who could be helpful with suggestions and ideas, including spouses and family members, close friends, church leaders, other ministers, the local Associational Missions Director, and denominational and ministry leaders. Possible ways that a church might express their appreciation and recognition to their pastor/minister, include:

* Plan an appreciation and recognition moment as part of a Sunday service.
* Host a church-wide fellowship meal or banquet in their honor.
* Select members of the congregation to share testimonies of appreciation, highlighting the ministry of the pastor/minister in the church and community.
* Provide extra vacation time or a sabbatical leave for the pastor/minister.
* Present the pastor/minister and their family with special gifts from the church family, such as
* Pay for a special trip of interest to the pastor/minister and family;
* Purchase and give them items related to their hobbies or interests;
* Give a monetary gift or love offering to them and their family;
* Buy computers or technological items that would bless their life and ministry;
* Pay for the pastor/minister and family to take part in a mission trip;
* Begin retirement planning for the pastor/minister with an initial gift, or increase their retirement contributions;
* Provide financial gifts and assistance to help pay for their continuing ministerial education in college or seminary;
* Purchase books and other study aids that would aid them in ministry;
* Provide tickets to sporting or entertainment events;
* Purchase items of special need or interest to the minister and his family;
* Present them with special gift certificates for a date night or get-away trip for the pastor/minister and spouse, and be willing to babysit their children;
* Give them plaques of recognition and appreciation;
* Make a donation in honor of the pastor/minister to a ministry, mission, or charitable organization that is special to them;
* Develop a book with letters of recognition and appreciation from the church family and community;
* Produce an appreciation/recognition video highlighting their ministry in the church and community;
* Pay for improvements or renovation to their office, home, or parsonage.

Always remember also to think about and include their spouse and family in your expressions of appreciation and recognition. Many ministers’ family members are greatly involved in and supportive of their loved ones’ ministry, they are faithful in service and devotion to the church, and they are generous and understanding about the time demands this places on their family. Showing meaningful love and respect to family members is a wonderful and important way to honor and thank a pastor/minister.

Possibly the most important joy and appreciation you can bring to your pastor/minister are the spiritual and personal blessings of being a faithful, growing disciple and servant of Christ in your life and through your church, and being an encouraging, supportive Christian friend. The life of ministry is one of great paradox, where we experience great highs of celebration, then difficult lows of struggle, and spiritually and personally this can take a toll on a minister and their family. Commit that through your faith, service, and friendship you will be a positive, encouraging force for the cause of Christ in the life of your church, pastor, and ministers. Some of the greatest blessings of appreciation and recognition you can provide to them are:

* **Pray for them.** Pray for God to bless and use their daily life and ministry. Pray for them before and during services, and in their preaching, teaching and ministry moments. Pray for their family. Pray for their spiritual, personal, emotional, and physical needs and health.
* **Be an encourager to them.** All pastors/ministers need supportive friends. Share kind words of encouragement. Write letters, texts, and emails of encouragement. Take them to lunch and meals. Invite them to join you for fun times and activities of interest to them. Especially encourage them by letting them know how and when God has worked through their ministry to help, bless, and mature you in life and faith. Recognize the special occasions and moments in their lives like birthdays, marriage anniversaries, work anniversaries, etc.
* **Speak positively of them in private and public.** Share with others the positive and good things about your pastor, ministers, and church. Refrain from complaining, criticizing, and negativity, especially on social media platforms. Remember especially on Sundays to not bring problems and negativity to your staff and church, and let the Lord’s Day be totally focused on worshipping and experiencing Christ. The other needs and issues can wait until Monday. Help resolve issues of conflict in a loving and quiet manner in church.
* **Serve and give faithfully in your church and life.** Ministers are greatly blessed and encouraged by people who willingly and faithfully serve and give to Christ and His church. Pray about, find, and use your spiritual gifts, talents, and opportunities in Christian ministry and church service in evangelism, discipleship, ministry, missions, and worship. When there are needs for volunteers, prayerfully consider stepping up to serve. Commit to give tithes and offerings as a faithful steward and financial supporter of Christ’s work through your church.
* **Commit to spiritual growth and Christian living.** Ministers are blessed by the process, discussions, and fellowship of growing in Christian faith and service together with their church family. As God is working in you and through you, share with your pastor/minister and celebrate and pursue God’s will together. Make personal worship through prayer and Bible study a foundation of your life, and join with your church family as an active participant in corporate worship.
* **Respect the personal and family time of your pastor and ministers.** Encourage your ministers to take and enjoy their days off, as well as their vacation time. They need those times of rest and refreshing. Do not call your pastor/minister during these personal times unless you have a serious need. Save the other discussions for their office hours. Support them in being involved in the activities of their children and families in their schools and community. Encourage them to live life based on the right priorities of Jesus Christ, their spouse, their children and family, and THEN their calling as pastor/minister.

On behalf of pastors and ministers, thank you for the blessing and privilege of serving Christ and His church with all of you as church members and leaders. Let’s work together to appreciate one another, encourage one another to be everything Christ has called us to be, and glorify His name and advance His Kingdom. Let it be said of us what Paul said of Philemon: “Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.” (Philemon 1:7)

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