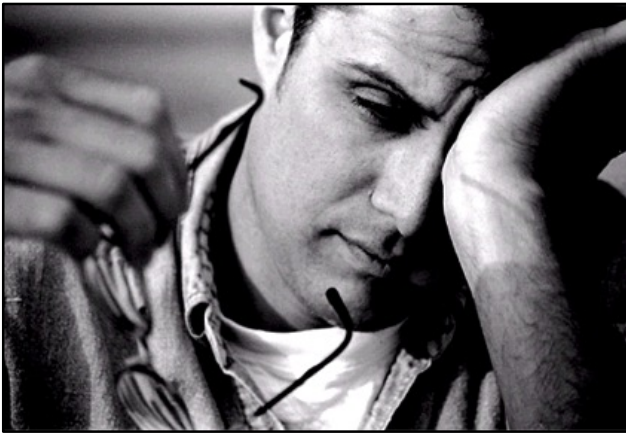


# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 15 JANUARY 2017



## 10 Ways to Bless Your Minister

*Jo Swinney*

Leading a church is a tough job: the hours are long and irregular, the expectations are impossibly high, the definition of success is vague and “spiritual” and yet indisputably linked in the minds of many to attendance figures and finances.

A minister's life and family is under scrutiny and held up as a model for others, their home is perceived by some as an extension of the church building, and they are under constant pressure to project personal piety and unrattled shininess.

It is in the interest of the whole body of Christ to keep our leaders in good shape, and as a minister's wife, it is very definitely in mine. Over the years my husband has worked for churches, I've seen the difference it makes to his wellbeing and therefore to his ability to serve when the church has his back.

Stress and burnout rates among clergy are well documented. Here are ways to look after our church leaders so they don't become another sad story of a pastor chewed up and spat out by their congregation:

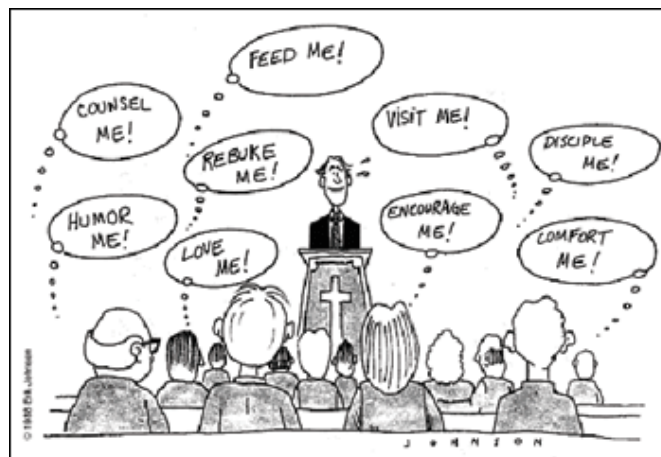
### 1. Pray for them

Pray they would have wisdom, vision, and discernment. Pray for their health, their marriages,

and their children. Pray for spiritual protection and a deepening relationship with God. Pray hard and pray often. There's a lot at stake.

### 2. Watch your mouth

It's so easy for a toxic culture to develop in a church – clusters of people gossiping, criticising, spreading discontent and disunity behind the scenes. Our words have the power to build up or tear down. It won't be hard to find negative things to say about your minister – they might well be arrogant, indecisive, administratively challenged, pastorally insensitive, prone to preaching for too long, a bit smelly – but what will you achieve by discussing any of this behind closed doors? Let's choose to play our part in fostering a church culture of mutual respect and kindness.



### 3. Check your expectations

I've seen some hilarious job specs produced by churches hunting for their new minister. What they really want is Jesus. What they will get is a human being who will be a sad disappointment if they don't adjust their expectations. It will be a great

blessing to your pastor if you only expect what is reasonable to ask of a human.

### 4. Grow in spiritual maturity

There are few tangible sources of job satisfaction for church leaders, but nothing makes them happier than seeing people taking off spiritually. If you've seen God at work in your life lately, if you've discovered a love of the Bible or a passion for prayer, if you've shared your faith at work for the first time, or got a handle on a besetting sin, tell your leader: it will make their week.

### 5. Pull your weight

One of the very practical ways we can bless our church leaders is by pitching in and working alongside them to make things happen. It is horribly disheartening to have pleas for help repeatedly fall on

deaf ears and can lead to an unbearable burden of responsibility. Could you stay a few minutes late after church meetings to wash up the coffee cups and put away the chairs? Could you take on the church magazine, or lead a prayer group, or organise a choir for the Christmas services? Many hands make light work and all that.

## 6. Give money in a predictable way

Churches rely on the financial contributions of members. It takes a huge amount of stress away from church leaders when we sign up to give in a regular, reliable manner – budgets can be written, plans can be made and it creates a measure of job security.

## 7. Give them frequent, detailed encouragement

When a minister has poured heart and soul into preparing and delivering Sunday's message, an offhand "Nice sermon" at the door doesn't cut it. If we particularly appreciate or notice something good our church leader has said or done, let's try and tell them. That way they are less likely to be destroyed by the critiques they inevitably receive.



The author's husband: Rev Shawn Swinney

## 8. Give their family some space

A church leader's family, if they have one, can feel they are constantly under the microscope. This can put huge pressure on a marriage and on children, who are all too aware of being watched and may well act up as a result.

## 9. Don't vote with your feet

When things at church are heading in a direction we don't like, or we feel an important aspect of the Christian life is being neglected, or we think we're unappreciated or unsupported, the easiest thing to do is walk away, and find another church that works better for us. But if we are seeking to bless our leaders, surely the right thing to do is raise the issue and seek to be part of the solution. Quietly removing ourselves is ultimately an act of passive aggression.

## 10. Respect their authority

We don't much like authority these days. John Stott wrote in his book *Between Two Worlds*, "Seldom if ever in its long history has the world witnessed such a self-conscious revolt against authority." Yet Hebrews 13:17 urges us to "have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority." As it goes on to say, this is the ultimate way to bless them: "Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden."



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