

Church Ministry Employment Manual

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Chapter 1

The Pastor as True Professional

Introduction

Throughout this Manual it is asserted the local church pastor is to be regarded as a true professional. This recognition is based on the biblical record of both the Old and New Testaments, and it is also based on the subsequent historical record of the church. All of these witnesses confirm the fact, in deed the necessity, of the people of God requiring the full-time services of a person, or persons, dedicated to equipping the church for ministry, known today as the professional pastor. In the past Christian denominations, largely run by pastors, intuitively understood the pastor as a professional, and protected the identity and function of pastors in the local church setting. However, today it is the local church, largely run by laypersons, that does most of the decision-making regarding employment relations with the pastor. In this relatively new arrangement there seems to be a growing anti-clericalism at work, part of which wants to redress perceived historical power imbalances exercised by the clergy, and part of which wants to distance itself from the negative stereotype of the modern professional. But the resulting ambivalence in the workplace is causing much confusion and hardship in employment relations in many churches. The purpose of this chapter is to provide both concepts and context as to why, for the sake of long-term employment stability in the church, the pastor should be properly regarded, and treated as a true professional.

A Brief History

The history of the professions is the history of the development of the “expert” in human undertakings. By the beginning of the Modern Period there were three professions extant. The three “old” or “traditional” professions included the doctor, the lawyer and the cleric. Each of these occupations had one thing in common - the knowledge required to perform each these services was beyond the capabilities of the ordinary person to provide. With the advent of the scientific and industrial revolutions a number of other professions were added. These included the scientist, the teacher, the engineer and the accountant. In the 19th century the new professions along with the old professions of medicine and law made the transition to become the “modern” professions. What characterized the modern professions was the protection of the rights and interests of both the practitioner, and of the public, by state sanction. Previously anyone, with no formally recognized training could simply “hang their shingle” and be in business. Now, while it remained the prerogative of the professions to organize, train and make its members accountable to a certain standard of service, it was the state that actually granted the license to practice. In the case of clerics, however, in most countries of the Western world, the time-honored division of church and state precluded any such arrangement.

The Rejection of Traditional Authority

Until well into the 20th century this did not pose a problem for the traditional pastor. The regulation of the work of the pastor had always been the sole province of the churches. Thus the preservation of the pastor's professionalism, in this case sanctioned by the churches, remained essentially the same as their secular counterparts. But by the close of the 20th century there occurred a totally new challenge to the church. This was the rise of Post Modernism. At the core of Post Modern thought is the radical critique of all traditional authority. Thus for the past three or four decades we have witnessed the "deconstruction" of many values and institutions once cherished by society. The church, for its part, has not been unaffected by this new spirit, where in varying degrees there has been a rejection of the traditional authority of the cleric as the denominational head, and the rejection of the traditional identity of the pastor as a true professional. The former is most plainly seen in the shift of real decision-making power away from the denominational head to the local church. The latter is most plainly seen in the new presumption on the part of lay decision-makers in the local church on what should constitute the scope and limits of the pastor's work.

The Rejection of the Church's Expert

While it may be successfully argued that the pastor has often had an inordinate amount of power, and that power has been abused from time to time, in both the denominational and local church settings, it must also be recognized that with the power shifts which have taken place the traditional wisdom of employing the pastor as "expert" in conducting the spiritual ministry of the church is also placed in jeopardy. Therefore if there are to be changes that should take place in the church at this time, these changes should not be done at the expense of the pastor's traditional professionalism. Rather they should be done in a way that continues to support and take advantage of that professionalism. The main reason for this has not changed since the advent of professionalism in the first place. The church, in purely human terms, remains a very complex organization that requires the services of the expert to make it work. And not just any kind of expert, but one who is called, committed, highly trained, and accredited to perform that expertise in that organization. Thus whether we are talking about running the bureaucracy of a large denomination, or ministering to the faithful in the small independent church, the complexity involved in both these situations continues to require the particular expertise of the professional pastor.

The Marks of the Professional Pastor

The marks of the professional pastor are the marks of the true professional in every sense of the word. As we have already observed the cleric is considered one of the original three of the “old” or “traditional” professions. But since we know the church as an institution anti-dates the formation of both the formal practice of law or medicine, we can conclude with confidence that the role of the pastor occupies the distinction of being the first of the professions. Nevertheless, the essential marks of the pastor remain no different than the claims of all the modern professions. These essential marks include, 1) a sense of calling or mission to serve, 2) the performance of that service on a full time basis, 3) the possession of a unifying theory of knowledge and technique in the provision of that service, 4) a compatibility and relevance to the basic social values, identity and destiny of the public it wishes to serve, and finally, 5) the autonomous control and self regulation of that service. While the authenticity of some of these marks regarding the modern professions may be open to dispute by a skeptical public, all of these marks still apply with equal vigor and weight to the pastoral profession. Thus, in the final analysis, we are able to conclude with all justification, that not only is the professional pastor the holder of the distinction of being the first of professionals, but also of being the quintessential professional as well.

The Pastor as Professional Equipper

The key distinction that must be made, therefore, is not whether a pastor is to be considered a professional or not, but rather what should the formal scope and limits of that professionalism consist of? More precisely, what is it that takes place in the church that consistently requires the services of the professional pastor? Contrary to much current thinking in church growth circles, the primary function of the pastor is not to “lead” the church *to* growth, but in accordance with our Synergistic System, it is to “equip” the church *for* growth. While it is to be recognized that the pastor does play a symbolic leadership role in the church, it must not be forgotten that is role is just that, symbolic. The real decision-making power must always be recognized to lie where it belongs, in the trustee leadership of the church. Thus, in this new conception, the scope and limits of the pastor’s professionalism do not stray into illegitimate areas of responsibility, but are properly restricted to the delivery of services he or she is trained for and hired to perform. Also, in this new conception, the traditional use of the pastor as expert in the church is also preserved. The scope and limits of the pastor’s professionalism are, therefore, neither artificially enhanced, nor unfairly diluted, to fit the current and often arbitrary expectations of the congregation, or the latest church growth fad for pastors. Rather, by recognizing the professional pastor as the primary equipper of the church, they are fully preserved, yet properly limited to the fulfillment of this one single overall function.