

20 THINGS I WISH I'D UNDERSTOOD ABOUT PASTORAL MINISTRY

(or a few things I picked up while planting a church that may benefit every pastor)

1. Pay close attention to your relationship with God.

- Church planting (pastoring) is above all else a spiritual exercise (what God will do IN you is as significant as what God will do THROUGH you).
- Read, meditate on, and memorize Scripture.
- Learn to receive forgiveness—you will need it.
- Listen to the Spirit and follow his leading, even when it's scary or seems a little risky.
- Find a spiritual director.
- Your relationship with God will tend to take a back seat to the urgency of ministry.
- Remember and take a Sabbath.
- Retreat so you can hear from God—this world is a noisy place.

2. Don't underestimate the "spiritual battle."

- Prayer is not preparation for the battle; it is the battle.
- The evil one does not want you to succeed.
- Satan will try to distract, confuse, and derail you with an endless array of activities and opportunities.
- You will be criticized.
- You will be broken.
- Beware of pride and stubbornness (God hates both and they destroy community).
- Stay close to God, especially when things are going well.
- Stay close to others (a trusted few); isolation opens the door to moral failure.
- Pray and encourage others to pray. "A church community is built on its knees."

3. Take care of yourself.

- "Many leaders start well but few finish well" (R. Clinton). Don't be one of the casualties.
- Be careful not to rationalize behaviors that may end your ministry.
- Maintain your emotional health by loving, giving, and resting.
- Exercise. Take care of your body.
- Get adequate sleep and "down time."
- Protect your personal and family time. Set appropriate boundaries.
- Continue to learn (you're not that smart☺).
- Don't believe everything people say about you, both the good and bad.

4. Pay close attention to the needs of your family and friends.

- Don't get so busy that you neglect your primary mission field.
- You will be completely ineffective if your home is in disarray.
- If you are fighting battles at home, you will lose your passion and your capacity for ministry.

5. Make a plan and stick to it.

- Have a crystal clear ministry plan in place from the beginning. Follow it or you will wander and get lost (planning and the work of the Holy Spirit are NOT mutually exclusive).
- Don't give into the pressure to "be all things to all people."

6. Be able to articulate your mission, vision, and core values.

- Always have a strong biblical foundation for everything you do.
- Your God-given dream must be clear and understandable (vague ideas are not sufficient).
- Ask yourself: "What will this church look like? How will we be the church in this community? How will we know if we're on track (cf. Acts 2)?"
- Filter EVERY decision through your mission statement.

7. Spend time developing a leadership core.

- You can never have too many people in your core.
- Host lots of desserts, dinners, lunches, coffees, and informational meetings. You can never over-communicate the vision,
- Plan to spend a lot of one-on-one time with people in order to gain their commitment to Christ and to the church.
- Don't allow highly controlling or highly needy people to dominate the core (this can cause you to lose sight of your mission and vision).
- Pay attention to and utilize those with the "chemistry" (relational) gifts.

8. Make "agenda harmony" a priority.

- Focus on being a healthy church.
- Spend time as a church being quiet and listening to God.
- Cultivate grace, and resist legalism.
- Be authentic—nothing creates tension and unrest faster than phoniness.
- Competing agendas will derail your ministry ("Lead when necessary; listen when appropriate.")
- If you begin to drift from your mission, address it.
- Prepare yourself for criticism. Receive it (even from your harshest critics), learn from it, and move on. "The harshest critics are always those least qualified to give it."
- You will be called "controlling, dictatorial, manipulative" (or worse) by those who possess competing agendas.
- Allow your vision to "leak"—repeat it at every opportunity.
- Don't compromise on core values.
- Work with those who aren't on the "same page," but don't be afraid to offer, "out-counseling."

9. Develop leaders.

- You can't do it all.
- You shouldn't do it all.
- You aren't gifted enough to do it all.
- Your calling is to "equip [prepare] God's people for works of service (cf. Ephesians 4: 11, 12).
- God has gifted others to lead. Let them!
- Train those who are gifted and have demonstrated potential.
- Learn to let go.
- Ministry isn't about getting from point A to B as quickly as possible; it's about taking as many people as possible with you on the journey.

10. Make evangelism a priority.

- Remind yourself continually that ministry is, first and foremost, about Jesus Christ.
- Model evangelism by engaging in it yourself.
- You may not have the gift of evangelism, but you are called to do the work of an evangelist.
- Understand and clearly articulate the gospel.
- Teach others how to talk about their faith journeys.
- You will never grow a strong church apart from seeing people come to faith and grow in faith.
- Focus on "holistic evangelism." We're called to make disciples not converts.
- Make sure your church is ready to welcome new believers and unbelievers.
- Encourage people to cultivate their friendships with unbelievers.
- From the beginning, establish the fact that the church (and your church in particular) exists primarily for the sake of others.
- See to it that your church grows by conversions and not merely by "shuffling sheep."

11. Develop relationships with other pastors in your community.

- Get acquainted with other pastors in your community. Meet with them regularly and pray for their churches.
- Demonstrate to other pastors that you are not a "sheep stealer."
- Partner with area pastors and churches to do Kingdom work.
- Openly share your vision and passion with other pastors in the community.
- Develop strong relationships with other Covenant Churches in your community.

12. Talk openly and honestly about money.

- Don't overdo it, but talk about money early and often.
- Let people know what it costs to do ministry in your community.
- Find a qualified person to lead your finance team.
- God expects individuals to give, and he expects churches to give. In fact, it's a blessing to do so. Make sure your church experiences the blessing of giving to the Conference, the Denomination, and other ministries and mission organizations.
- You model faithful giving (If you don't give how you can expect those in your church to give?).

13. Refuse to allow mediocrity to slip in.

- God doesn't ask us to be the best, but he does ask us to give him our best. So, do EVERYTHING with excellence—i.e., worship, service, greeting, hospitality, etc.
- Time is short. Go for it passionately.

14. Be careful when adding staff.

- Don't hire staff when volunteers can do the job. If you do, you deny someone the opportunity to serve.
- Be careful in handing out titles. Not everyone is ready for leadership.
- Never hire or place a deeply wounded person in leadership.
- Provide job descriptions for every leader, whether paid staff or volunteers.
- Always hire the best person you can find. As a rule of thumb, always look for people more gifted than you.
- Hire generalists first, and then specialists as growth and financial resources allow.
- Hire slowly and fire quickly." Don't allow a "bad fit" to become a divisive situation. Confront, correct and, if necessary, cut them loose.

15. Ask for commitments.

- Never shy away from asking people to commit themselves to Christ and his church.
- Don't be afraid to ask people to join your church.
- Ask for big commitments. Invite them to dream big dreams and walk with you and others on this God-sized adventure.
- Challenge people to step out, to take a leap of faith.
- Adopt budgets that require faith.
- Focus of what God can do not on what you can't do.
- "You have not because you ask not."

16. Never forget the mission.

- From the beginning make it your intention to plant more churches. Set a time frame and stick to it. You don't want your church to be the last church that is planted.
- Learn about your community, engage with your community, get to know your community—e.g., government officials, schools, police and fire departments, local business leaders, etc. Find out what the needs are in the community and begin to meet them.
- Be active in the community. Ask yourself: "If our church were to close, would anyone miss us?"

17. Over communicate.

- Faithfully and consistently share what God is up to in your church.
- Regularly celebrate what God is doing.
- Recognize volunteers often and publically.
- Meet often, not to conduct business, but to have fun, to talk and to share about all that God is doing, how he's leading, and what others are hearing from him.
- Share stories with the local media.
- Create ways to connect with your leadership on a regular basis (at least once a week).

18. Celebrate the “wins.”

- Every time a life is impacted, celebrate it.
- If you have a staff, find ways to have fun and celebrate what God is doing.
- Play together, as a staff and as a church.
- Look for the God-events that take place everyday.
- Give glory to God everyday for all the wonderful things he is doing in and through your church.

19. Structure your church wisely.

- Build your church on the foundation of prayer.
- Make sure you plant in the right location.
- Don't choose a church name that is overly cryptic or one that communicates something unintended. Don't try to be cute. Be clear.
- As you develop outreach ministries, avoid overly churchy language and behavior. Be aware of the sub-culture to which we belong and recognize that those outside the church don't "get us."
- Consider families with children in all that you do. Don't wait too long.
- Find the right people for leadership. Don't entrust this "new baby" to the wrong people.
- Call on your coach's expertise—you are called to plant; your coach is called to coach.
- Make sure your vision appeals to all kinds of people, not just believers.
- Don't imitate other churches. Imitation has been called "the most sincere form of flattery," but in church planting it's suicide. Be who God is calling you to be.
- Understand the people you are trying to reach. You won't reach everyone, so know whom it is that you can reach, and go for it!
- Deal with conflict and problems in the church. Don't wait. Don't try to avoid them and hope they'll go away. They won't. They'll only get worse.
- Don't try and be too edgy or innovative. "Church boring" done well works. If you try and be too cool it only complicates things (and besides, none of you are really that cool).
- Don't spend so much time planning that you never get around to doing. Work hard to get "the church in your mind" into the real world.
- Commit adequate time (50 hours per week) to developing your new church.

20. Ask the “important” questions.

- “Are people becoming Jesus-followers?”
- “Are broken people being healed?”
- “Are our people hungry and thirsty for justice and righteous living (Are our hearts being broken by those things that break God's heart?)?”
- “Are people desiring and learning to live in diverse community through love?”