

10 Ways to Edify Your Pastor

I've been participating in the life of a local church for over four decades. For most of these years, I've either been the pastor's kid, the youth pastor's wife, the children's pastor, or the elder's wife.

In all of these roles, I've had the privilege of witnessing the beauty that happens when the members of the body of Christ work together to proclaim the Good News. At the same time, I've also had a front row seat to some less-than-beautiful moments that left some people hurt, confused, and wondering if they would ever want to be a part of a local church body again.

Despite some of the pain I've witnessed and experienced, I remain an absolute believer that God has chosen His Church – the body of believers around the globe – to be the hands and feet of Christ to a lost and lonely world.

One of my deepest passions is to help local churches become healthy growing bodies. Here are ten positive ways that church members can support their church leadership.

1. Pray for your church leaders – both the paid staff and the volunteer leaders.

Pray that their fervor – for God and His Word – will increase daily. Pray for wisdom in their leadership and decision-making. Pray for their marriages to be strengthened and renewed. Pray for their kids.

Pray. Pray. Pray.

Become an intercessor on behalf of your leaders. We don't need to know all the details of every matter in order to pray. The Holy Spirit already knows how to pray. Follow the Spirit's lead.

2. Give your leaders permission to be less than perfect.

No one is perfect. Leaders are real people. Church leaders have a human nature they wrestle with too.

And no one's family is perfect either. Church leaders have strong-willed kids too.

A healthy leader leads from a posture of humility and doesn't try to present a picture of perfection. And a healthy church will allow its leaders to be a little less than perfect too.

3. Understand the actual role of each leader and the function of the church.

Church members oftentimes place unreasonable expectations on their leaders. Yes, pastoral leaders are there to serve, to teach, to equip, and to protect the flock.

But they're not there to solve all of our problems. They're there to walk beside us through our valleys and celebrate with us on our mountaintops. But no one person can be everything to everyone – except, of course, Jesus.

The best way to understand the role of each leader and the function of the church is to do due diligence before signing on as a member.

- Are you familiar with your church's Statement of Faith?
- Are you aware of your church's denomination and/or its affiliations with other denominations?
- Do you understand and accept how your church's leadership structure works?
- Do you know the story of how your local church came into existence?
- Are you knowledgeable of your church's constitution and bylaws?

A wise church member will do their homework before joining a congregation.

4. Remember your lay leaders.

Smaller churches may have more lay leaders than larger churches, which can afford larger paid staffs. Try to remember that your lay leaders have jobs outside of their volunteer positions in the church. This likely includes the elders. They aren't available 24/7 for phone calls and meetings when they have to be at their places of work 40+ hours per week in addition to the time they serve at church.

The next time you cross paths with a lay leader at your church, tell them how much you appreciate the way they serve and their personal sacrifice of time and energy.

5. Honor your leaders' commitment to confidentiality.

There's a big difference between secrecy and confidentiality. Secrecy is the attempt to hide information. Confidentiality is the way to care for a person with grace and common courtesy. Pastors and elders are oftentimes in a position where they know about deeply personal and private matters that are occurring in the lives of church members, or even other staff members.

Yes, we live in a Facebook-driven culture, where people seem to have less and less of a filter these days, but that does not mean that church members are entitled to know every detail of another person's private life. Neither are church members entitled to know every detail that may have been behind a leadership decision. Such details are sometimes an HR issue. And all legal issues aside, there's a common decency factor that leaders must abide by. These kinds of situations especially need discernment and sensitivity. That's why the leaders are there. They're there to lead with wisdom through difficult times.

6. Allow your leaders to worship on Sunday morning.

Do you have something you need to discuss with a pastor or an elder? Please don't corner them in the foyer or in the courtyard on a Sunday morning. Let them worship with their families. And let them complete the job they supposed to do on Sundays. Make a phone call or send an e-mail during the week to set up a time when you could meet.

Choose the right time to discuss your issue.

7. When you have a grievance with another church member or one of the leaders, follow Matthew 18 and go directly to that person after having given the matter much prayer.

Do not discuss your grievance with your small group as a "sounding board." That's gossip.

Do not meet with a friend at Starbucks to "ask for their wisdom" on the matter. That's gossip.

Do not offer up a "prayer request" on the matter with your friends. That's gossip.

When you have a grievance, pray first; then go directly to the person your grievance involves. Follow the order set forth in Matthew 18.

8. Never send criticism in the form of an e-mail, or worse, an anonymous letter in the offering basket.

If you have a concern, do as #6 and #7 says: 1) Set up a time when you can meet, and 2) Go to the person directly. And, of course, #1 is always imperative too. Pray. Pray. Pray.

Maturity involves a face-to-face conversation whenever possible. Difficult conversations should never happen in an e-mail or a letter.

9. In times of crisis, be present.

Sometimes the negative people draw the most attention because they're the loudest. But instead of being loud, let's be strong, let's be courageous, and let's be present.

Your leaders need the body of Christ to surround them with love and encouragement, especially in trying times. A crisis either brings out the best in a person, or the worst. When a crisis hits your church, pray.

Pray and be present.

10. Encourage your leaders with words of affirmation.

You'd be surprised at the burdens your church leaders often bear, and they bear them silently out of their desire to honor confidentiality – and sometimes they're honoring the confidentiality of the very person who is slandering them!

Be a positive presence in their lives. Speak words of encouragement.

*Reprinted with permission from Missional Woman. **Denise J. Hughes** teaches writing at a Christian university, where she enjoys connecting with students and sharing her faith in Christ. She's the author of *On Becoming a Writer: What Every Blogger Needs to Know*, and she devotes her blog to helping others develop their craft and deepen their faith. You can connect with Denise on her blog – or on Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest.*