

16 Things Your Pastor Does When He's Not Preaching

"What is it you have to do when you're not preaching?"

"Must be nice to only work one day a week."

"I'd like to come see you this afternoon. Since it's not Sunday I'm assuming you're free."

Believe it or not, I've heard all of those. Most are simple misunderstandings. Sometimes people are just trying to be funny.

I must admit. It's not always funny—not laugh out loud funny at least, because the jokes have grown stale by now. They are still new to someone I suppose.

But, especially when it's said as an indictment that pastors have it "easy" it can even hurt. That's probably true even more for my pastor friends in smaller churches where they carry the weight of multiple staff positions.

So, what does a pastor do when not preaching?

That is a valid question. This is not meant to seem as a complaining post, but an informational post. You only know what you know. I don't know what the doctor does when not seeing patients or all the things that teacher does when not in the classroom. Every job has its own responsibilities that are clearly known until you do the job.

The answer for pastors is—lots of things. Lots. A day is seldom the same.

The pastor wears many hats. Some of them of which you may not even be aware.

Here are 16 often unknown roles of a pastor:

1. Counselor. All pastors do some counseling. Many pastors—I might add most pastors—are not qualified to do extensive counseling. They can't commit the required time, nor do they have the expertise. Still, some counseling is a part of nearly every pastor job.

2. Career coach. One of the most frequent requests for my ministry help has to do with people's career steps—from school to employment. And, I've heard similar from other pastors. Because work—or lack of work—greatly impacts a person's life it is a huge part of the pastor's life. In fact, I keep a file of people in our church who are looking for work or looking for someone to hire.

3. Business advisor. It may be because I have a business background, but I think it also comes with the role. Business leaders—especially self-employed business owners—want help discerning the right decisions. (I admire that about them.) One place they consistently seeking input from is the pastor.

4. Custodian. I can't stand a piece of paper on the floor. If I see a trashcan overflowing—I don't call someone—I do something about it. Most pastors I know want the facility ready when people arrive. So, they do what they have to do. In fairness, I don't do much of this. Mine is a more supervisory role. We have a large facility and an excellent team. I do know pastors, however, that have to help on a larger role in facility maintenance or custodial care.

5. Arbitrator. I've stood between a few people before trying to work through division and build cooperation. It could be in a marriage or I have even been between business partners in the church. People often want a third-party objective and many times they look to the pastor for that role.

6. Social worker. I read a definition of social worker recently. Seeks to improve the quality of life and subjective

well-being of individuals, families, couples, groups, and communities through research, policy, community organizing, direct practice, crisis intervention, and teaching. Yea. That.

7. Volunteer coordinator. Every pastor must learn how to coordinate the efforts of different people, who communicate uniquely, and have their expectations of volunteer leadership.

8. Events manager. I need to be honest. I don't fill this one often, although I do have some responsibilities with events. I am no good at the details of it and thankfully there are people in our church who can fulfill this role better than me. But, most pastors, including me, have responsibility for events at some level.

9. CEO. Let me be very clear that Jesus is the CEO of the church. (Some may argue Jesus is the owner and He left us to provide everyday leadership—under His direction.) If I get critics on this one criticism it will be because they misunderstand what I'm saying or maybe on my ability to say it where they can interpret it accurately. But make no mistake about it—the pastor is expected to lead so many aspects of the church. On every major decision of the church most churches want the input of the pastor. Regardless of the structure of the church it can feel very much like a CEO position. (And, I've been one in my previous business career.) This is one of the larger uses of my “non-preaching” time. By the way, I have talked with dozens of pastors who don't feel prepared for this role.

10. Fundraiser. Ministry takes money. And, most of the church looks to the pastor to be the primary solicitor of contributions. (Honestly, it's a huge burden to most pastors and one they don't feel comfortable doing.)

11. Recruiter. No church can function without volunteers or leaders. Most pastors are consistently looking for new people to get involved and lead ministries of the church. And the

search for volunteers is a continuous effort.

12. Trainer. Pastors consistently help people learn how to do something. Whether it involves life skills or how to function within a ministry of the church, one of a pastor's primary goals is to help people improve in areas of their life.

13. Scholar. I'm not the smartest person in our church. But, at the same time, the church has a certain level of expectation regarding my understanding of history, the Bible, and current events—locally and around the world. Most expect the pastor is to be well spoken and well read.

14. Writer. I estimate I average five to seven writing assignments a week beside my message and my blog. Bulletin articles. Church-wide emails. Letters of recommendations.

15. Manager. Every pastor manages someone—even if they are volunteers. In fact, volunteer management may actually be more difficult.

16. Public relations. This part of a pastor's role is increasing daily. The days when a Sunday announcement or bulletin announcement would get the word out to the church are gone. With so many mediums to communicate and people's divided attention among them—not to mention the frequency of attendance for many in the church—communicating to people has become a huge challenge for pastors.

There's my list. I'm sure there are others. And, it's a labor of love—certainly of calling—for most pastors I know, but it requires more than preaching.

And, I didn't even mention politician.

Granted, the size of the church will often determine the amount of time spent on anyone of these. But, except in exceptionally larger churches, the pastor wears multiple hats. It's certainly more than a Sunday job. And, many pastors,

myself for one, spend up to half or two-thirds of our week preparing for Sunday.

It should also be noted (and this is an edited addition resulting from a comment) –the pastor shouldn't do ALL of this. I spend much of my energies helping pastors learn to be better leaders that ultimately means learning to delegate. I believe in the Acts 6 and Jethro models of pastoral leadership.

Thankfully, I serve in a church where most of these tasks are primarily assigned to other staff members for direct oversight. I actually had other pastors in mind when I wrote this more than myself. But, in all of these roles, at some level, in most churches they are under the pastor's purview. If there is a need for or problem with one of them the pastor will be looked to ensure it is addressed. Therefore, whether or not the pastor does all of these personally, there is a level of responsibility. To ignore this and point to an "ideal" job description of a pastor would be naive, in my opinion.

One final thought, considering these roles, imagine how that plays out for bi-vocational pastors. Say an extra prayer for those pastors.

Pastors, are there any other roles we serve?

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