

PASTORPEDIA™

Cutting Edge Conversations for Pastors and Church Leaders

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Polygamy is not good!

In a small sense, the pastor-church relationship is a marriage of sorts. But if the real spouse feels like the church is a spouse of higher favor, there is pain. Trouble, “right here in River City.”

Most churches will not protect the pastor’s marriage. We must build our own hedges or fences to protect our own marriage relationship. Here the three of us admit some failures and specify some good goals.

We will mostly write about a pastor and his wife, but believe all suggestions apply equally to female pastors and their husbands. We all need God’s wisdom to do this better.

Gratefully,

Knute (Jeanine), for Jeff (Heidi), and Jim (Anne)

What mistakes have you done or seen? Mostly seen!

Jeff Bogue

- They are mostly about balance and inclusion. The classic mistake is overworking and feeling like you need to be the driver and definer of the church and therefore you're pulling all of your time and energy away from your family and spouse.
- The antidote to that is balance. Looking and saying, "I'm going to make sure that after I give a lot of time to the church, I correct my schedule and also invest heavily in my family."
- For Heidi and me, what she's asked of me is that her expectations about my schedule are met. This means, if we agree I'm going to be home Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings that I'm actually home Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings. It's not that she wants all my time or demands all my attention; it's that when she is expecting I'll be home, and then I have to change it, it is disruptive to her and the children.
- The other part of that is inclusion. Whatever my spouse wants to be included in, she is, and whenever I receive praise I share that praise with her also.

Jim Brown

- Way too many churches place unusual expectations on the wife to be involved in everything the husband is leading.
- Allowing ministry to become your first and only love. I have on my business card these three titles: Husband-Father-Pastor. If I fail as a husband or father, then I fail as a pastor.
- Booking events on the calendar without verifying availability.
- Failure to help your wife feel she is a vital support and help in your call as a pastor.
- Failing to recognize her role and support in our ministry.
- Knowing how much to share regarding people's concerns and how often to withhold those details.
- Neglecting seasons of refreshment and vacations to recharge with each other and God.
- Allowing the church to become an idol you worship instead of Jesus.

Knute Larson

- No, mostly done! It is so easy in this calling to smother everything else except the church.
- Time and interest issues, of course. As in many leadership jobs, one's work for the church is never done; it can be carried home, to the table, and to the bed. Our identity is too easily the church.

- Pastor's can spend their emotions and energy on the church, its potential, and people. This can result in running on empty at home if he or she does not watch it! And only the pastor can watch it and be full of care instead of full of the church.

The Good Samaritan was good because he saw a need and met it, unlike the two church leaders who were too busy doing "church" work to take care of a need right in front of them.

Do the Catholics have the better idea?

Jeff Bogue

- No! Your spouse is absolutely a benefit. I like to say when I'm training young leaders, "Your spouse will make you or break you and there is no in between." When you marry someone who is as passionate about the vision of the ministry and church as you are, there is no greater gift on the planet.
- I was asked one time by a young leader, "What was the most important decision you ever made as a pastor?" I said, "I married well." I really believe that. Heidi is a great, great asset and she should be valued as such.

Jim Brown

- No!
- I cannot imagine doing ministry without my wife. She offers so much incredible insight, wisdom, and discernment to what comes our way.
- In my case, I would not enjoy ministry as much without her, as I love to share with her first, all that God is doing!
- My wife, Anne, offers things that I can never bring to the table. She is my greatest supporter, helper, and prayer warrior!

Knute Larson

- I assume you mean about having only one wife, the church. 😊 It is true that we, pastors, can do things of love that make a spouse feel competition or feel secondary. The answer is first a hard commitment and then a good "master schedule" to keep balance and priorities.
- Even the Apostle Paul agreed with the idea that when you are single you can give so much more time and attention to the church, implying that marriage takes time and attention, and showing where the Catholics got the idea.

What are some proper expectations for the spouse of pastors? Improper?

Jeff Bogue

- My expectations of the pastors' wives, is that they love and serve the people of the church like a committed volunteer would.
- I do not think of them as another employee.
- I do not think there's a special set of expectations that should be thrust upon them.
- When I think about elders or leaders within our church — how they give their heart, their time, and their effort to the people of the church, that's the type of love that I would want our pastors' wives to have for the church.
- How they do that, can change a thousand times. Their season of life affects their level of involvement (e.g., moms raising young kids are generally not as involved as moms who are empty-nesters). I don't put parameters on them which demand certain things. I just want them to love and serve the people of Grace Church.

Jim Brown

- They are not employed by the church.
- They can use whatever their gifts are without any special pressure being placed on them.
- They should have the same expectation of any Christ-followers.
- Plus, let them be good parents and give their best to their children as they help to raise them.
- My wife, Anne, has had a variety of ministry opportunities, and most were flexible enough for the season of life our family was in.
- Allow them to live out their God-given dreams in the local church without any special pressure being placed on them.

Knute Larson

- It certainly is proper to want to feel that you are first, after Christ, who commands that marriage be primary and prominent. This certainly would be known by attention, listening, time, and emotion.
- It would be proper to want to be referred to with love and honor from the pulpit or in private. Never sarcasm or put down.

- It would be proper to have scheduled dates, vacations, time together alone, serious moments. Again, the need for a master schedule! 😊
- It is proper to desire full allegiance with no competition from others in the church or out.
- It would be proper to desire to have sufficient spending money, time alone with the pastor when he is not acting like a pastor, and strong help with any children. The spouse deserves freedom to serve the church in the way he/she chooses. And certainly that the pastor lives out what is spoken in the pulpit, and more.
- It would be improper to expect that there would be no interruptions or church headaches or misunderstandings or tragedies. Church people are way too human and creation groans way too much for those things not to be there. It is the interruptions that we can help and the competition that we ourselves choose that become the sore spots.

Should only married people be hired as staff?

Jeff Bogue

- No! First of all, that's unbelievably unfair. 😊
- Secondly, everyone has a unique set of values. Being single — or being married — both make you a unique teammate who can serve in (your own) unique ways.

Jim Brown

- Well, if that were the case then Jesus would have been disqualified.
- No!
- Singles can serve in many capacities in the local church as a pastor or director, and they have great flexibility in their schedules!

Knute Larson

- No, no, no. But it is wise to have clear and strong policies about relationships, church events, and attention.
- Churches must each decide, but some of the best preparation for a life of ministry can start as singles who are college students doing part-time staff and ministries, learning while interning with a church. Singles who have experienced divorce, even while seeking to follow Christ, can often be a great help on staff in larger churches to help people make it on the other side of divorce or pain.

- I also have a negative response because an excellent source for full or part-time staff is widows or widowers who would love to give 15 to 25 hours a week or more for care, children, administration, or more. Often they take 8 to 10 weeks off each year for vacation, or going south.

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Jeff Bogue, of [Grace Church](#), in several locations in the Bath-Norton-Medina areas of Ohio; Jim Brown, of [Grace Community Church](#) in Goshen, Indiana, a church known for its strong growth, family and men's ministries, and community response teams; and [Knute Larson](#), a coach of pastors, who previously led The Chapel in Akron for 26 years. Pastorpedia is brought to you by [CE National](#). Visit cenational.org/pastorpedia for more issues and to read the bios of our contributors.