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FOREWORD

>> Building a Church That Lasts

THE IMAGES ON TELEVISION had foretold what I would find when I arrived in hurricane-ravaged New Orleans, but in my heart I refused to believe it. Floodwaters had drowned much of the city I had called home for a decade, but what had happened to the church where I had served my first pastorate?

In my imagination, the people who had made our community so lively were still there, engaging in all the wanton activities that made ministering the gospel to them so challenging. But on my first visit, months after the flood, I found the news reports were true. New Orleans was a ghost town. A few residents had returned, but in our old neighborhood, most houses were shells with gaping black holes where doors and windows had been. There was no traffic. No thumping bass stereos. No guys playing basketball in the street. Just silence.

Stopping on our familiar block, I was heartened to see most of my former church's buildings still standing. A friend had sent me photographs of the devastation inside—pews and furniture ripped from their moorings, upended and crumbling—but the brick walls now before me seemed solid despite weeks of steeping in sour water. A side door was open, so I climbed the metal stairs to the balcony of the old sanctuary. I hoped to catch

hints of the work we had done there over most of a decade restoring the facilities and leaving an exuberant congregation in place to minister to our increasingly urban community.

Instead, there was nothing.

A contractor had demolished the choir loft and shoveled out the debris. The muck had been scraped from the floor and walls. But there were no pews, no pulpit. The room was hollow. With so few people returning to the city, it appeared unlikely that the church would reopen. From the balcony, I wondered what difference our ministry a decade earlier had made. Of our worship and work and preaching and pastoring, what had survived? Even more, in ministry, what lasts?

“If it seems sometimes that you’re pastoring a parade, you are!” I recalled that wry observation from my seminary president. His summation of the transient nature of congregations was helpful to me as a young pastor serving a church in a rapidly changing community. Now I recalled his advice about making the most of the time we pastors have with people and not fretting so much when they’re gone. “To everything there is a season,” the president said, “including your time with a congregation. Make the most of it.”

He also said, “A call to preach is a call to prepare.” So many of my classmates talked about skipping

seminary and going directly to the mission field or a church. Our president cautioned us to dig deep into our studies, for people would need from us a ministry built on solid foundations. “Don’t skimp on your preparation,” we were rightly warned. “You need the wisdom of those who have gone before you.”

The advice of smart colleagues and forebears had served me well in my first pastorate. Apparently, good counsel lasts. But what else?

After the flood, I was deeply saddened by the possibility that my former congregation would not survive. I poured out that complaint to God. Then, in the space of a few weeks, I received unprompted e-mails and phone calls from people who had been members of the church when I was pastor there. They told stories of great times we’d had together and how they are now serving Christ in distant places. I was cheered as they spoke, and I realized afresh that it’s what we do with people that lasts.

The Church Leader’s Answer Book is about doing what lasts. It is an important aid to us who minister in a complex world. The choices we make on a daily basis may affect generations to come. We may not consider some aspects of church leadership in such grand and far-reaching terms, but it’s true that decisions about facilities and budgets, governance and ministry teams, community outreach and spiritual formation affect our people for years. Some of the decisions we

make, such as those on carpet and sound systems, seem temporary. Others, such as adjusting our worship and evangelism styles to match the demographic shifts in our neighborhood, seem more permanent. But in truth, all those choices have lasting value when they help people grow in the likeness of Christ.

Frankly, I could have used a guide like *The Church Leader’s Answer Book* during my first pastorate. And I welcome it to my work and to my bookshelf today. To have so much wisdom distilled in a single volume is invaluable.

With a fresh perspective on ministry that lasts, I appreciate the insight of experienced leaders whose legacy is not about the facilities they built, but whose influence lives on in people whose lives were changed while they met in those facilities, people who still remember a few life-altering sermons, and who carry on in ministry in the places where God has taken them.

Exploring the transience of life, the psalmist pleads with the Lord to “establish the work of our hands” (Psalm 90:17). Another translation renders the verse “give permanence to our work.” That’s our prayer for you—that God will enable you to do ministry that lasts.

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administration

PART ONE



Church Management



THE PASTOR'S CALL TO ADMINISTER

by Robert H. Welch, dean of the School of Educational Ministries and professor of Church Administration at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas

“Lord, we’ve got a problem. I thought you called me into ministry to reach the hurting and to care for the spiritual and physical needs of the people you would lead my way. You never mentioned budgets, committees, carpets, or banquets. I spend more time making decisions about who gets the van, who should repair the boiler, and where we should buy Sunday-school literature than I do preparing my sermon.”

If you have ever shared these sentiments, you may find it helpful to take a fresh look at the role of administration in your ministry. The few times the word *administration* appears in the New Testament, it is translated from a Greek word that means “helmsman.” The helmsman was indispensable to a ship, for without his direction, the vessel was virtually helpless. The ship could have great ballast, a keel for stability, and a strong sail for power, but without the helmsman’s hand on the tiller, the boat would be tossed about by wind and wave.

Within the word *administration* is the word *minister*. We know who ministers are, whether we call them pastors, priests, elders, or clergy, but what ministers do is another matter. A minister’s role is less clearly defined than we might wish, and

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this can frustrate or anger pastors. Anger can lead to low morale and job dissatisfaction, which in turn may result in burnout or forced termination.

The roles of a pastor can be divided into two groups: traditional and contemporary.

1. *Traditional roles*

- Preparing and delivering sermons
- Leading worship
- Administering sacraments
- Officiating in church rites (weddings, funerals, etc.)
- Visiting the sick, counseling, and caring for the hurting
- Biblical teaching and new-convert training

2. *Contemporary roles*

- Managing and overseeing a church or parish
- Strategizing, planning, and leading church programs and activities
- Developing a budget and managing finances
- Overseeing maintenance of the church facility
- Networking with outside church organizations
- Recruiting, motivating, and training staff and church leaders

Ask ministers to name factors that contribute the most toward an effective church, and they will typically respond with items from the first list. Less often they will mention administrative and organizational responsibilities. Yet when asked to name the roles that take up most of their time, pastors usually mention administration and organization. Most ministers estimate that 50 to 60 percent of their week is taken up in administrative matters.

What Others Expect

In addition to their personal expectations for their roles in ministry, pastors encounter the expectations of other clergy (denominational officers, for instance) and of people in their congregations.

Unrealistic and unclear expectations from others are the greatest sources of role conflict for most

pastors. That is why I tell students or colleagues about to take a ministry position to make sure that a clearly understood job description is in place. Such a job description should identify the ministry tasks to be accomplished, including the administrative chores that go with the job. It should also clarify the top priorities of the position, define who will help a leader make decisions, and explain what will happen if the job proves to be too complex.

The expectations of church members are often the greatest challenges for a pastor. Conflict is almost certain when any of the following circumstances apply:

- A pastor's tasks are not clearly stated, though parishioners have expectations
- Pastors and/or parishioners fail to accept the pastor as an executive leader
- A pastor must focus energy on pleasing a centralized, denominational hierarchy at the expense of meeting congregational expectations

What It Takes to Survive

Several years ago, *Christianity Today* discussed the sudden rise in forced terminations of pastors in a major denomination. The article attributed many of these cases to burnout or to conflicts between ministers and their congregations about administrative expectations. The article noted that the better a minister's administrative and organizational skills, the less likely it was that he or she would be terminated. Ministerial survival depends upon the ability to develop leaders, build support, and achieve a consensus of church goals, norms, and values. All of these are administrative functions.

In this chapter, you will find many helpful ideas for making the administration of your ministry more effective and enjoyable.

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OVERCOMING OVERLOAD

by Dale Burke, pastor of First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, California

Every leader must learn the art of juggling. By grouping all my activities into four major catego-

ries and setting aside time for each one, I keep my work balanced with my family time and my spiritual life. Fewer things get dropped.

My four *R*'s for overcoming overload are *rest time*, *results time*, *response time*, and *refocus time*.

When a juggler gets into a rhythm, he stays with it for a while, concentrating on his routine. He would never think of taking a phone call or checking his e-mail while flipping knives. Similarly, I focus on one objective at a time, allowing enough time to do it well. I plan my week in large chunks of time—full-day or half-day units—each devoted to one of the four *R*'s. When I try to do more than one *R* in a block of time, I get frustrated. My stress level goes up, and my productivity goes down.

So when I rest, I truly rest. When I'm in results time, I don't let distractions intrude. When I'm in

response time, I give myself away as a humble servant. And when I refocus, I take time to listen to God, reflect, and rethink plans for the future.

The key is to separate the four categories, then keep them separate.

Rest Time

In rest time, I focus on my health, especially in my spiritual life, marriage, and family. God built into creation a universal need for rest, and he commands us to set aside one day a week for it. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work" (Exodus 20:8-10). God designed all creation around the principle of

! TIME-MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- 1. Determine your peak production time, and use that time for the tough jobs.** "Larks" work best in the early morning hours; those who are most effective at night are called "owls." Decide whether you are a lark or an owl, and plan your work accordingly.
- 2. Don't try to accomplish difficult tasks in one sitting.** A succession of mini work sessions will probably be more productive than working late into the night on an involved project.
- 3. Conduct hundred-dollar meetings.** A church member told his committee chairman, "I can make at least a hundred dollars any evening I'm working. I'll be a responsible committee member, but I want you to know that every time I attend a meeting, it costs me a hundred dollars." Acknowledging that everyone's time was valuable, the committee chairman decided never to hold a meeting worth less than a hundred dollars. With planning and organization, a meeting can be efficient and effective.
- 4. Use a wastebasket file.** You can add valuable time to your day by throwing junk mail away without opening and reading it. That's right—you can trash many things before they cross your desk.
- 5. Ask, "What will happen if I don't do this right now?"** If the answer is nothing, consider whether the job needs to be done at all. Often we spend time on relatively unimportant tasks that only matter to us.
- 6. Use only one calendar.** A busy schedule necessitates a planning calendar, but only one. One calendar on the desk at work, another on the wall at home, and a third one in your briefcase will guarantee trouble. It's too hard to maintain current information on all three calendars. Use a PDA (personal digital assistant) in sync with your computer or a paper planner such as a Day-Timer or Franklin Covey planner.
- 7. Consolidate tasks.** Planning often prevents poor performance. Try to return all telephone calls at a particular time in the day. Write all your letters in one sitting. Check e-mail only twice a day.
- 8. Visit on the other person's turf.** This helps to control the length of meetings because it's easier to end a session when you're in another person's office or home than when the other person is visiting you.

—Jim Danielson

Sabbath rest. We are healthier and more productive when we don't work 24-7.

During rest time, I do absolutely nothing related to the job. No phone calls, no e-mail, no job-related reading, no quick stops at the church "just to check on one thing."

The congregations I have served have ranged in size from a twenty-eight-member church plant to my current church of more than five thousand. In each setting, one of my best disciplines was taking Mondays as a Sabbath rest for my wife and me. That has kept me sane and happy under the pressures of ministry. I dedicate one day a week to refreshing my soul and my marriage, and I've never regretted the investment.

Results Time

Results time is dedicated to doing "main things." Priorities may change as a church grows, job descriptions change, or God begins new things, but whatever the main things are at a given time, they are defined by three characteristics:

- 1. They are mission critical.** A main task is essential to the health and growth of the ministry. It must be done well if the mission is to move forward.
- 2. They have top priority.** Though a church's focus will change over time, its leaders must prayerfully set priorities and have them approved.
- 3. They grow out of unique abilities.** Over time, I have reduced the scope of my responsibilities to reflect my unique abilities. Where God-given gifts, passions, and experiences converge, a leader finds his or her unique ability zone.

When we structure our schedule around main things and give them our best effort, we produce our best work. Apart from an occasional crisis, we have no excuse for pushing main things into our least-productive times. For me, sermon preparation is a main thing, so I take most of Wednesday, Thursday morning, and Friday morning for prayer, study, and preparation time. Sermon preparation is blocked out on my schedule every week for now and forevermore, amen.

Dedicating large chunks of time to this main

thing allows me to be more productive during other times of the week. I don't stress out about my sermon on Tuesday when I'm busy with meetings and administrative details because I know that Wednesday is coming.

Response Time

Response time is for cleanup and follow-up. These things are important, but not critical to the church's mission. As a servant leader, I realize that the people I serve have their own agendas and their own needs. I want to be responsive to them, but I must also protect my rest and results times.

In ministry, unexpected things happen. We may be tempted to pick up little bits of debris here and there, but if we sweep everything together into larger piles and deal with them in good-size blocks of response time, we'll knock out the work more efficiently. I set aside three afternoons per week for responding to e-mail, voice mail, staff issues, counseling, and other work that flows from the well of ministry.

Serving the needs of others is important. Meeting those needs, however, is not a leader's main thing. It is important that we not allow the needs of others to control our times of rest, results, and refocusing. If we first set aside blocks of uninterrupted time for rest and results, we can respond joyfully to other people's needs.

Refocusing Time

In refocusing, we take time to assess, adjust, and plan for the future. Life and leadership are constantly changing. Even if our organizations appear stable, the world around us is in flux. When our priorities shift, we learn to refine our unique abilities. If we experience a tough month, we must refocus our plans for rest, results, and response.

Refocusing does not mean completely changing direction. It means taking the opportunity to make the fine adjustments needed to keep life in balance. It asks, "Am I getting the rest and results time I need for personal health and the advance of the mission? If not, what changes should I make?"

When I break from my routine to reflect on my ministry, I get fresh insight for maintaining

the elusive equilibrium of servant leadership. To provide adequate time and prayer for the small and the sweeping changes that God wants me to make, I find it necessary to refocus on different segments of my life at different times. I use three types of refocus time:

1. **Weekly refocus time.** Refocusing should be done at the beginning or end of each week. Even a few hours of refocus time per week vastly improve the future. We need to ask ourselves honestly, “So, how is it going, really?” We must also review the other *R*’s, asking, “Am I resting as I should? Am I maintaining my marriage and family to the glory of God? Am I providing prime time for my main thing? Am I responding with a servant’s heart to those who need me?”
2. **Monthly refocus time.** Our staff members take a half day every month to get away from the office. They can go to the beach or the park with a lawn chair, a yellow tablet, and their ministry plan. “Reflect, dream, listen to God, and refocus,” I tell them. “Come back with some fresh goals and adjustments to your priorities.” It really works!
3. **Yearly refocus time.** Some pastors schedule an annual retreat for sermon planning or spiritual refreshment. I recommend dividing such retreats into three parts: (1) working on main things, (2) personal growth and enrichment, and (3) refreshing your relationship with your spouse.

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HOW TO TAME THE TO-DO LIST

by Grant McDowell, pastor of Leduc Alliance
Church in Millet, Alberta

When our staff of two met for a long-term planning and goals review, my colleague was visibly stressed. “My whole life is church,” she said. “I’m drained by ministry. I want to be able to go home without thinking about work all the time.”

We talked about delegating some of her du-

ties, but she was already doing that. When I asked about her schedule, she produced a to-do list with sixty-four items on it. No wonder she felt pressured! Her list included everything from meetings and telephone calls to recruiting ministry leaders and revising ministry positions. With a little help, she realized that more of her duties could be delegated, but that still left an intimidating list.

Eventually, we arrived at a simple two-step process she could use for keeping her priorities straight and her workload in perspective. She focused on five priorities and sorted items into manageable blocks.

Focus on Five Priorities

The cluttered pages of my colleague’s planner were self-defeating. I suggested she choose no more than five things from her big list of sixty-four and write them on a clean page in her daily calendar.

To determine which five to choose, she first evaluated deadlines, beginning with the most urgent. She asked what needed to be done by tomorrow, then by Sunday. Next she asked, “What steps can I take to make visible progress toward long-range goals?” By narrowing her focus, she discovered that many tasks were less urgent than she had thought.

After she chose five items, we established a rule: She had to finish all five tasks before she could add a sixth one. Then she could choose up to five more. We made two exceptions to this rule. On Fridays, if she had time, she could choose one more task for the day. And if something on the big list unexpectedly needed immediate attention, it could replace one of the five already chosen. The replaced item then returned to the big list.

In this way, she controlled the pressure of too many things to do and gained a sense of accomplishment.

Sort Items into Manageable Blocks

My colleague also needed to remove the clutter from her monthly calendar. Too many little squares were overflowing with writing. First, we decided that she would only record evening appointments

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9:00 a.m.– 12:30 p.m.	off	off	5-item list	study and preparation	study and preparation	off	Sunday school and worship
1:30 p.m.– 3:30 p.m.	off	5-item list and phone calls	staff meeting	5-item list	unexpected	undefined ministry time	
3:30 p.m.– 5:30 p.m.	off	people time	phone calls	people time	unexpected	people time	
7:00 p.m.– 9:00 p.m.	off	open for ministry or meetings	youth ministry event				

in her planner. She would write other appointments in a day calendar, where they were visible alongside her daily list of five tasks.

Next, we developed a master copy of her weekly calendar. We divided each day into three segments: morning, afternoon, and evening. We subdivided the afternoons into two task sessions. Within these boxes, we reserved time for working on the list of five to-dos, study and prayer, relationship building, meetings, and developing new ministries. As we assigned tasks to various spaces on the calendar, we discovered there was more time than we thought.

The plan works. It's flexible enough to meet the demands of ministry, and it balances ministry, administration, and personal life. It can tame the big list and make it a servant of ministry rather than a tyrant.

The master calendar at the top of the page helped my colleague plan her activities.

////// TOOLS FOR PERSONAL ORGANIZATION

by James L. Wilson, senior pastor of Lighthouse Baptist Church in Seaside, California

When I entered the ministry twenty years ago, I typed my sermons on a manual typewriter, kept my appointments on the twelve-month calendar my insurance agent gave me, stored my illustra-

tions in a three-by-five-inch card file, and kept my concordance handy for looking up Scriptures.

When I left the office, I carried a list of important phone numbers, appointments, and a to-do list on a pocket memo pad. I'd use a pay phone to call the office periodically to make sure everything was all right.

Times have changed! Today I have an office computer equipped with *WORDsearch*, a software program that includes several Bible translations, commentaries, maps, and Greek and Hebrew dictionaries; a Palm Desktop for managing personal information; and *INFOsearch*, a software program that stores and retrieves illustrations. My desktop computer is networked with other church computers, allowing us to share information and hardware. When I travel, I take a laptop computer with me that will network with our office computers.

To keep in touch with my congregation, I wear a pager and carry a cell phone at all times. To stay on top of my schedule, I've replaced my pocket memo pad with a Palm electronic organizer that is preloaded with a calendar, memo pad, address book, and expense tracker. With the touch of a button on the Palm cradle or modem, the organizer synchronizes itself with software on my desktop computer.

More Electronic Helps

Memory limitations prevent me from loading the entire Bible on my Palm, but Franklin Electronic Publishers offers a palm-size electronic Bible in the King James or New International versions. It includes the complete text of the Old and New Testaments and a built-in searchable concordance

to find passages quickly. I can search for Scripture by keyword as well as by book, chapter, and verse. The electronic version also includes daily devotional verses, storage capacity for up to fifty bookmarks, and adjustable type sizes to make the text easier to read.

Electronic Bibles help pastors save time. “With the electronic Bibles, flipping through hundreds of pages is eliminated, so you can spend more time reading passages than searching for them,” says Denise Bleidorn, associate product manager of Franklin Electronic Publishers.

Low-Tech Helps for Staying Organized

Jack Alien, former pastor of Cottonwood Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, has a high-tech office, but he prefers a low-tech approach to organizing his ministry on the go. “The best system for me is a cheap pen and a legal pad used with a two-page-per-day planner,” he says. Every Sunday afternoon, Alien uses his legal pad to prioritize a to-do list. Next he sorts the tasks into what he needs to do himself and what others can do. Then he transfers the list to his planner and makes a few phone calls to delegate the other tasks.

Several systems are available, but Alien is currently using a Day-Timer. “It includes the functions that I find necessary—this, last, and next month’s calendars on every page; a page for appointments, expenses, and things to do; and a diary page to track what I actually did,” Alien says. He appreciates the high quality and low price of the product and the convenience of finding it online and at most office supply stores.



FILING FOR QUICK RETRIEVAL

by Lee Eclov, senior pastor of Village Church in Lincolnshire, Illinois

I asked a fellow pastor how he organized his files. “I have a big pile under a rock,” he said. “The rock is labeled *R* for *Religious*.”

Many pastors can relate to that, but because pastoral ministry is an information business, we need effective ways to store and retrieve the information we need. In any given week, a pastor may need information about evangelism training, a Bible study on 1 Peter, the rates for local camps, a good illustration on God’s grace, and a three-year-old church policy on building use.

I haven’t found even two pastors who use the same filing system, but everyone needs some kind of system to be effective in the information side of our work. We all deal with different kinds of files, and it helps to keep them separate.

- **Biblical/theological files.** This is my most valuable information, and little of it goes out of date. For this kind of file, I find that the topic/subtopic system works best, using three-tab file folders. I use the left-tab folders for fifteen to twenty major headings, organized alphabetically (except for the Bible files, which are in canonical order). I have Bible–General, Bible–OT Law, Bible–OT History, and so on.

When a major file gets too large, I use middle-tab folders for secondary headings. For example, Bible–NT Gospels may have general information, but I’ll eventually need a middle-tab file for each of the four Gospels. Then if I collect a lot of information, say, on the Sermon on the Mount, I would create a right-tab folder to be placed behind the Matthew middle-tab folder. Beyond the major sections of Scripture, I create left-tab folders for major themes, such as Church (or Ecclesiology), Jesus Christ, Christian Life, Man (Anthropology), and so on. Once a major left-tab folder grows, I work my way to second- and third-level folders.

- **Records.** Some church documents are filed by date (e.g., weddings, baptisms, funerals), whereas others are alphabetical (staff information, product warranties, counselees). Sermons, lessons, and writings can be filed (or cross-filed) by date, topic, or text. Most records can be kept most efficiently on the computer. For example, I have a file called Ministry Records in which I track child

! TIPS FOR MAINTAINING FILES

1. **Think ahead, particularly if you are a student or young pastor.** Will the system you are creating expand well over the years, or are you creating a monster that will eventually swallow your information whole and refuse to give it back?
2. **Keep up with your file management.** Filing seldom seems as important as other duties, but information that is not properly filed soon becomes useless. You won't remember what you have, and even if you do, you won't be able to find it.
3. **Don't save everything**—only what you can't readily access elsewhere (such as the Internet, church files, or your local library). For example, don't save whole magazines. You will probably never look at them again. Tear out only the best material and file it appropriately. Pastor Tom Cowan offers tips for creating a helpful database of articles at www.wordstudypublishing.com/Filing_System.htm.
4. **Use a published system**, if you can find something that works for you. One popular computer-based system adaptable to all kinds of uses can be found at www.thepapertiger.com.
5. **Be consistent with headings and topics.** Use "God, Power of" rather than "Power of God." Either use an established system or keep a written list of your topics so you can scan it easily when choosing where to file an item.
6. **Deal with cross-filing.** How do you file something that fits more than one subject? Would you file information on the Sabbath under Exodus, Spiritual Disciplines, or S for Sabbath? One simple solution is to put a note, perhaps on a particular color of paper, in a secondary folder that indicates the location of a pertinent item.

—Lee Eclov

dedications (date, name, parents), marriages I've performed (date, names, place), conversions through people in our church (date, name, brief summary of the story), baptisms (date, name, approximate age), and funerals (date, name, other information). I also keep a file folder with photocopies of wedding licenses and another file of funeral records.

- **Local church and community information.** This information is important to me because I serve a particular church in a specific community (there are some exceptions, such as denominational information). Therefore, I keep this information separate from the biblical/theological files. One could also keep local church information separate from community files. The local church files, in alphabetical order, cover all committees, budgets, policies, and ongoing projects. Records can also be included in this file drawer. Different colored label can further help to identify different kinds of information.

Community-related files include local businesses and services I use regularly (e.g., bookstores, office-supply stores), local ministerial information, camps, parachurch organizations, counseling and social service offices, and local government offices. Resources such as directories, time-sensitive catalogs, and business cards can also be kept in this general file.

Though it is a bit messier, I keep some of these files—the ones I use almost every week—in the file drawer of my desk. Files that I use less frequently are in a file cabinet.

- **Library.** Most pastors keep their books in logical groupings (e.g., commentaries, theologies, pastoral helps). General categories such as these probably work adequately until a library grows large (two thousand volumes or more). Then you may need to use a formal library system such as the Dewey decimal system.

For many pastors, keeping track of books they've loaned is a problem. Do not rely on your memory—or the memory of those who borrow your books! Be sure that anyone who

borrowing a book signs it out on a clipboard or card with their name, the book title, and date.

- **Illustrations.** Keeping track of illustrations and quotations is a special challenge because of the sheer volume of material a diligent collector may accumulate and because a good illustration might be categorized under several topics. Online systems (such as PreachingToday.com) provide access to large databases of current and well-researched material, but they do not allow you to add your own. Some flexible databases can be purchased (see www.infosearch.com), or you can create your own.
- **Computer files.** Many of our most important files today are digital, and the computer makes these files easy to manage. Still, the My Documents folder in Windows can quickly become My Mess if you're not careful. The capacity to keep files in folders, to create levels of folders, to sort material alphabetically or by date, and to search all documents for a misplaced file has revolutionized filing for all of us. Generally, you can use these systems to keep track of long-term information.

Two suggestions: (1) Back up files regularly and keep valuable backup files in a separate place; and (2) Take seldom-used material off your computer and store it elsewhere. This saves space and keeps your working files cleaner and less complicated.

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HOW TO KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO DELEGATE

by Kent R. Davies, a freelance writer living in Anacortes, Washington

When lay leaders hear their pastor speak of overwork, they often echo the words of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law: "You've got to delegate more." But pastors often face a bind that others don't recognize. Like Moses, we sometimes must learn to trust others with responsibilities that we're reluctant to give up, but we also know that just because it would be nice to delegate some jobs doesn't mean there are people lining up to help. Here are some guidelines for navigating this organizational challenge:

- **Keep a personal activities log to determine what you can delegate.** For about a month, make a list of every task you do and every decision you make. Then identify which tasks and decisions you might delegate. Which are rare or occasional duties and which are regular? Prioritize the list and consider what two or three top responsibilities could be delegated.
- **Consider to whom you might delegate these duties.** Begin with prayer. If the Lord wants these responsibilities off your plate, he will prepare someone to help you. Ask other leaders for



READING ESSENTIALS FOR THE UNORGANIZED

- > *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry* by Robert Welch (Broadman & Holman, 2005).
- > *Feeding and Leading: A Practical Handbook on Administration in Churches and Christian Organizations* by Kenneth O. Gangel (Baker, 2000).
- > *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration* edited by James D. Berkley (*Christianity Today*/Baker, 1994).
- > *Learning to Lead: Bringing Out the Best in People* by Fred Smith (*Leadership*/Word, 1986).
- > *Management Challenges for the Twenty-first Century* by Peter Drucker (HarperBusiness, 1999).
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suggestions. Go through your directory. Warning: Sometimes when you publicize a need, you get an unqualified volunteer. Turning that person down can be awkward.

- **When you've chosen someone, meet with him or her.** Help the person understand this task as a significant ministry—to you, if no one else. Tell the person why you selected him or her and what this person's help would mean to you. Before the meeting ends, pray with the person about the task.
- **Be specific about the job.** If you aren't clear about what you want done, you can't expect someone else to fill in the blanks. Be clear about deadlines, but don't expect too much too soon. Discuss what to do when you are gone. After the meeting, send a note or e-mail summarizing the task in writing, with the agreed-upon details and deadlines.
- **Delegate the authority needed to do the job.** When you ask someone to do a job, give that person the authority and the budget to complete it. Assure the person of your availability, but explain that you won't micromanage.
- **Give the person an out.** Agree on a three-month trial period, or ask a person to try a new task four or five times and let you know what they think. People are more likely to try something if it doesn't obligate them indefinitely.
- **Maintain accountability.** As a supervisor of delegated tasks, you are still accountable for their completion. A busy pastor delegates many jobs, so it can be difficult to monitor everyone's progress. Put reporting deadlines on your calendar so you won't forget to follow up.
- **Say thanks often.** Do not take people for granted, especially volunteers. Write a thank-you note after they finish a task. When you pass people in the hall, remind them of how much you appreciate their efforts. Ask occasionally if they have everything they need.
- **Remember that you are shaping a disciple of Jesus.** This is your opportunity to help others grow by doing. Encourage their initial efforts, give them space to find their own way of doing things, and let them learn from their mistakes.

You may be pleasantly surprised at how creative people are when they have freedom to grow. Remind them to pray through the tough spots, and help them remember that this is a ministry to the Lord.



MINISTRY CHECKUP

DO YOU NEED A CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR?

by John R. Throop, founder of the Summit Group

1. Can you describe the latest changes in the tax code affecting church employees?
2. What specific elements in your state's personnel laws affect hiring procedures at your church?
3. Has the community group using your church's multipurpose room next Thursday night signed a building-use form and liability waiver?
4. What are your church's cash-flow projections for next month?
5. Did the church remember to send a card to people in the congregation whose birthday is this month?

How did you answer those questions—with difficulty? Over the past twenty years, the business affairs of most congregations have become mind-numbingly complex. Pastors often oversee facilities management, personnel matters, finances, and tax issues while maintaining their preaching and teaching ministries and developing lay ministries. A secretary or administrative assistant may not be able to keep pace with specialized knowledge, and volunteers can easily be overwhelmed. In an effort to restore sanity, many churches are hiring business administrators, who are charged with careful oversight of the congregation's affairs.

"When you're dealing with millions of dollars in church financial and property assets, you really need someone trained to focus on those things," says Brian Bakeman, business administrator for St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City, which has an average Sunday attendance of about one thousand.

DISTRIBUTING THE LOAD

Pastor Rick sighed before venting his frustrations to the church board. “I feel like all I do is put out fires. Don’t get me wrong—I want to help people when they come to me with their problems. But it seems like I never have time to work with the healthy people who can make a difference because I spend all my time responding to people with problems. We really don’t have the resources or the personnel to help these people so that I can concentrate on being the pastor God called me to be. I’m asking you for some help.”

What Would You Do?

- **As a member of the church board, what observations would you share with Pastor Rick?**
- **What steps would you take to help him focus on his other pastoral responsibilities?**
- **How would you address the void that might be created if the pastor refocused his priorities?**

What Happened

The board chairman began asking Pastor Rick how he spent his time. Before long, the board agreed that Pastor Rick’s concerns were legitimate. Board members began to explore solutions. Someone suggested that the board should help the pastor identify potential leaders.

“Be proactive about meeting with these potential leaders,” the chairman suggested. “That way, you can control your schedule. People who come for spiritual care will have to work around your schedule instead of expecting you to work around theirs.”

Another person suggested that board members should increase their duties. A couple of members admitted their reluctance to do so due to lack of experience and said that training sessions would be helpful. The board also decided to challenge the church’s small-group leaders to assume a greater role in spiritual care.

Wearing Many Hats

A church administrator must wear many hats, says Simeon May, CEO of the National Association of Church Business Administrators (NACBA). “An administrator deals with all aspects of church finances, food service operations, information technology, office management, human resources, transportation, and committee work. It’s his or her responsibility to stay current with laws, court rulings, and current tax issues that the senior pastor doesn’t have time to focus on.”

If a church, even a small one, has an endowment, additional property, a day care, or significant grant income, a business administrator can be a huge help. “Whether the position is salaried or on a volunteer basis, the administrator’s job is simply to focus on what it takes to run a church,” says Janice Johnson, business administrator for First Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

“It’s all-consuming when you deal with facilities, personnel, and finances.”

Do We Need One?

When should a church hire a business administrator? May says that if a church has a Sunday attendance of three hundred to five hundred people or more and a budget of five hundred thousand dollars or more, the management issues it faces are complex enough to require an on-staff administrator. “With that size congregation, the pastor can’t do everything, and the issues are more complex than what a church secretary can normally handle.”

Volunteers can help, but at some point having a paid staff member becomes a better option. “As the church grows, it becomes less efficient for lay leaders to manage finances and property. There’s only so much volunteer time that people can give without feeling overwhelmed.”

On-the-Job Challenges

Church administrators work long hours, and no two days are the same, says Janice Johnson. “I easily work fifty-five to sixty hours a week, including two nights a week for meetings. I start my mornings by dealing with e-mail at home, and then hit the ground running when I get to church. You can’t have an agenda when you start the day, because it will change right away.”

Some tools make work easier for church administrators. Johnson accomplishes a lot through voice-mail distribution of announcements and policy reviews to staff. Brian Bakeman makes extensive use of financial management and facilities software, multimedia software for the Sunday morning worship services, and desktop publishing software for church communications.

Workshops offered at national conferences and seminars in human resource issues, financial management, and professional communication can further hone an administrator’s skills. Bakeman prefers attending business management seminars one year and seminars in Bible, Christian education, or spirituality the next. Janice Johnson finds pastoral care and interpersonal communication workshops helpful.

Where to Worship

Another challenge facing church administrators is whether or not to be a member of the church where they work. Teri Vasicek, an administrator in Aurora, Colorado, believes that separating work from worship has helped her be more effective on the job. It also allows her time to rest. “If you want to maintain a spiritual life, you have to worship in a place where people don’t know you as the one who has the keys or can fix a leaky faucet,” she says.

Simeon May says that some business administrators are uncomfortable being members of a church where they know the members’ stewardship details. However, there are no clear guidelines, he says. Some administrators have no problem being a member of the church they serve. Janice Johnson and Brian Bakeman consider themselves members of the church’s min-

istry team, so they see value in being associated with the congregation.

“For me, it all comes together on Sunday mornings,” says Johnson.



THE MINISTRY OF INTERRUPTIONS

by Gordon MacDonald, editor-at-large of Leadership and chairman of World Relief

A day at the office for Richard Wolf almost always started the same way. After parking his car, he would enter the administrative suite through a limited-access back door, head for his assistant’s desk, and hand her his PDA to download the latest version of his schedule.

He would then walk swiftly to his office and shut the door. He had learned that if he moved fast and kept his eyes down as if deep in thought, people would leave him alone. His “I’m carrying the weight of the world; don’t interrupt me” posture had become a trademark.

At his desk, Wolf would examine his updated calendar. One Monday morning, he muttered a bad word when he checked his PDA and saw that every hour had been crammed with administrative meetings and staff appointments. Every other day of the week was similarly overcrowded.

His frustration was due to promises he’d made to his wife and son at breakfast. He had committed himself to an afternoon with Hannah to see the fall foliage, and he had assured his middle-school son that he’d be at a Thursday afternoon soccer game. But according to his PDA, the family time wasn’t going to happen.

Everyone owns a piece of me, he thought. When did this stop being fun?

Seven years earlier, Wolf had preached his first sermon to a congregation of a couple hundred. Before long, the congregation had begun to grow. With growth had come building programs, an enlarging staff, a multilayered organization of ministries and programs, and invitations to speak at schools and conferences.

Seven years ago, Wolf had been accessible, with his home phone number listed in the bulletin. He was visible at most church functions. In those days, the church literature called him “Pastor.” But now his title was *Senior* Pastor. Someone noting this had said—kiddingly, of course—“You can see a *pastor* anytime, but you have to make an appointment to see a *senior pastor* on *his* time and on *his* turf.”

Wolf looked at his schedule for Monday. It included a strategic planning meeting, a budget session, a staff-training function, and fifteen minutes with the head of the personnel committee. That was just the morning. In the afternoon, he would meet with the executive minister, visit with a missionary family, and talk to two staff pastors who were upset about a revision in the reporting structure. He had to give a brief greeting to the women’s Bible study, say a few words at a twentieth-year celebration lunch for the church bookkeeper, and participate in a conference call with a college board on which he served.

The elders would meet that evening, and the finance committee had asked if Wolf could see them for thirty minutes after the other meeting was over. *Somewhere in the middle of all this madness*, Wolf thought, *there has to be some time to outline next Sunday’s sermon*. He always tried to do that by Monday night.

Unscheduled Interruption

In the grip of the day’s schedule, Wolf bumped into a woman who was standing at the receptionist’s desk. Not recalling her name, he asked a generic, “Hey, how’re you doing? Being taken care of?”

“Pastor, I was hoping I’d find you here,” she said. “Do you have a few minutes?”

Honestly? No.

The finance people were waiting, so Wolf ratcheted up the charm. “You know, I’m afraid I don’t. Why don’t you see if my assistant can get you on the calendar for later,” he said, knowing it wouldn’t happen. The next open slot for appointments with church members was two or three weeks away. Perhaps she could meet with one of the pastoral care people.

Three days later, Wolf’s assistant informed him that a church member had taken his own life. When he heard the name, he recalled the woman in the reception area. She was the dead man’s wife.

When guilt brought him to visit her at the funeral parlor (he didn’t usually attend wakes), Wolf learned that the woman had come to the church office that Monday seeking counsel about her husband, who had been out of work for six months, was drinking, and seemed unusually withdrawn. She had thought that if the pastor called him, it might lift his spirits. “He always admired you and hoped that he could talk with you. But everyone knows how busy you are,” she said, as they stood by the open casket.

Another Interruption

The next day, Wolf was heading to a worship-planning meeting when his assistant said, “There’s an old man here, a John Shepherd, who says he’d like to meet you. He’s not in our database. But—”

“What does he look like?”

When she described the man, Wolf looked startled. “*The* John Shepherd? The man I’m thinking of was one of the best preachers in America twenty-five years ago. I thought he’d died.”

“Well, he just wants to say hello. I could—”

“No, I’ll meet him. Tell the music people I’ll be right there.”

Wolf’s intuition was correct. The man was *the* John Shepherd.

He invited the visitor to his office. As they sat down, Shepherd said, “I hear your name often, and I read things you write. I’ve said to myself many times, ‘If ever I get a chance, I’ve got to meet you.’ Been in the area visiting my daughter and realized that your church was nearby. So she drove me over.”

Wolf said he was pleased that Shepherd had stopped in. Soon they were into an energetic conversation about ministries, leadership priorities, the health of the Christian movement, and other things that pastors like to discuss. Then, without warning, Shepherd asked, “So, is your work here satisfying?”

“What does *satisfying* mean?” Wolf asked. “Did *you* feel your work was satisfying?”

Shepherd nodded. “Yeah, I did. And my life remains satisfying. Even after retiring from the church, I haven’t stopped being a pastor. It’s in my blood, I guess. There are many times when I’m involved with someone, and I say to myself, ‘I was made for this!’ That’s very satisfying.”

“What kind of involvements are you talking about?” Wolf asked. “My life around here is all meetings. How did you lead a large church and stay, as you put it, *satisfied*?”

“I maintained a nose for ‘pastorable’ moments and built my ministry around them,” Shepherd said. “You know, those little surprise meetings with people in need of spiritual care. I resisted the temptation to see myself exclusively as a preacher and an organizational leader. I decided I would seize as many chances as I could to connect with individuals who were looking for hope, assurance, prayer, guidance, and—let’s call it *pastoral tenderness*. Every once in a while, I’d even have a chance to introduce someone to Jesus.”

“You’re not saying that a guy should sit around and wait for people to come to him, are you?” Wolf asked.

“Of course not,” Shepherd said. “You’ve got to maintain spiritual disciplines, study, and meet with your leadership team. But organizational activities grow to fit all the calendar space you’re willing to give them. They make you feel important, in charge. You can’t fall for that seduction.

“Pastorable moments, on the other hand, force you to think like a servant. They introduce you to areas of life you’d rather avoid. They remind you that there are some questions with no answers and problems with no solutions. You mustn’t hide from them, Richard.”

Wolf wanted to cry. Inner frustrations he’d been denying recently now threatened his composure, and his voice almost cracked. “A church this size insulates you from what you’re describing. They

call you a pastor, but you’re *not* a pastor in the strictest sense,” he said. “You’re just doing meetings about programs and politics.”

“Tell me, Richard. What is your wife saying these days?”

“Hannah?” Wolf laughed. “I’m expecting a come-to-Jesus talk about our home life any day. She sees me going 24-7, and we’re getting almost no time together. I’ve missed three of my boy’s soccer games.”

Shepherd looked at him intently. There were things about this young man he instinctively loved. Who could have known that he’d walk in here and become the younger man’s pastor for a few minutes? “Richard, this isn’t about large or small churches. I’ve had both. It’s about resisting the temptation to lose touch with real people and real issues. If ministry has become all about programs, you’ll dry out.”

“So what should I do?”

“Tell your staff and your elders that you’re no longer going to live by a schedule that isolates you from true ministry moments. Tell them you need for them to flex with you on those occasions when you feel the need to put pastorable moments first. They’ll get used to it.

“And read everything you can about St. Francis. If ever there was a patron saint of pastorable moments, it was he. He was quite clear about the devilish ways of institutionalism. He never stopped hugging lepers and blessing children and finding bread for the poor.”

Finally, reluctantly, Wolf stood up. “Tell me,” he said to Shepherd. “What do you think made you come here today?”

“Well, as I said, I was in the area, and my daughter mentioned your church. I don’t know.” He shrugged as if it were a mystery to him. “I just felt a pastorable moment coming on, and so I said . . .”

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