

# The Presbyterian Handbook for Pastors



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## *This Book Belongs to*

*Name* \_\_\_\_\_

*Address* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*E-mail* \_\_\_\_\_

*Telephone* \_\_\_\_\_

*Birth date* \_\_\_\_\_

*Birthplace* \_\_\_\_\_

*Baptismal date* \_\_\_\_\_

*Place of baptism* \_\_\_\_\_

## *Congregations Served*

*Name* \_\_\_\_\_

*My favorite story from this congregation* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Name* \_\_\_\_\_

*My favorite story from this congregation* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Name* \_\_\_\_\_

*My favorite story from this congregation* \_\_\_\_\_

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*My favorite story from this congregation* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Name* \_\_\_\_\_

*My favorite story from this congregation* \_\_\_\_\_

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# PREFACE

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## *Please Be Advised:*

Few professions call upon a wider range of skills, demand more of you personally, or offer as many unique rewards as that of pastor. Whatever the “parish” you serve happens to be—large congregation or small, student body, hospital, military base, synod, long-term care facility, or whatever—you know this to be true: pastoral ministry is a multifaceted challenge with no shortage of difficulties. One thing all pastors seem to agree upon is that if you want to survive ordained ministry you’re going to need a robust sense of humor. Without one you’re sunk.

Lots of books have been written over the years to address the challenges you face in ministry. Some fall into the self-help category and are filled with good information to help ward off burnout, workaholism, despair, and whatnot. Other books take a more positive, proactive tack and aim at providing good models for pastors, everything from Jesus himself to notable business leaders like Warren Buffett or Lee Iacocca. Some even cast Jesus as a business leader, giving him the veneer of a sharp suit and tie, all to varying degrees of success. Still others seem to want the role to be elevated to a higher plane than other vocations, and not merely “set apart” as the word *ordo* would suggest.

The little volume you now hold in your hands takes a slightly different approach from these. Its predecessor, *The Presbyterian Handbook*, focused on Presbyterian culture and theology, while *The Presbyterian Handbook for Pastors* peels back the veil from this most holy and earthy

profession to reveal everyday situations that every pastor encounters and to provide some helpful tips for coping. But these tips are offered with a healthy dose of humor (delivered wryly, of course, with tongue firmly planted in cheek), because the call to pastoral ministry can be, at times, not much fun. Laughter and prayer can help.

If you, dear reader, happen to not be a pastor, it is our fervent hope that you will catch an illuminative glimpse of the faithful life of pastors and thereby gain some new appreciation for this rarified role and the vagaries to which its members are subjected.

Being a pastor, of course, is not all pain and suffering. Far from it. For one thing, your medical insurance and pension are excellent. For another, you can get away with wearing a clergy shirt upwards of ten times without washing it, as long as you wear some kind of undershirt. And perhaps equal to these benefits is the constant knowledge that your job — this profession of planting seeds and patiently waiting for the growth — is all about the transcendent, transformative Word, Jesus Christ, who changes lives and brings us all into alignment with God.

—THE EDITORS

# *CALL STUFF*

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# HOW TO KNOW IF YOU'RE CALLED TO BE A PASTOR

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The call to be a pastor has two parts: an internal call and an external call. You need both to be one of the church's public proclaimers of the gospel.

## ① The inner call. (You may be called to ordained ministry if...)

- You recognize gifts of ministry and abilities you have been given by God. Often this awareness comes from others who tell you about your gifts.
- You regularly seek out Christ's benefits in Word and Sacrament, because without them you have nothing.
- You read and pray and think and learn so that you become steeped in the strong vocabulary of faith.
- You seek to demonstrate the Christian good news in the church and the world.
- You develop a callus from shaking hands on Sunday mornings.
- You can ingest large quantities of low-grade coffee without becoming ill.

## ② The external call. (You may be called to ordained ministry if...)

- The church has called you to speak God's Word in the world.
- You have been given approval by the presbytery to seek a call.
- You smile and reflexively extend your right hand at the approach of another person.

## Please Note

- Church leaders and pastors might encourage you to consider ordained ministry and assist you in discerning and affirming the internal call.
- You can explore your vocation in general and the call to public ministry in particular with the help of your congregation, Bible camp, campus ministry, or presbytery. Presbytery staff will also work with you in the candidacy process.
- Presbyterians believe that God gives us the gifts of ministry. The church helps identify these gifts, and a governing body of the church must confirm them.
- There are situations in which either the church or you yourself may determine that you are no longer called to be a pastor. At that point you may no longer function in the role of pastor, but like every baptized Christian you remain loved by God and called to give witness to God in your daily life.

# CALVIN'S CONVERSION AND CALL TO MINISTRY

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We do not know much about what today we would call John Calvin's "conversion" and "call to ministry." There is one little piece of autobiographical information in Calvin's preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*.

## Sudden Conversion

While Calvin was studying law, at the insistence of his father, "God nevertheless by His secret providence finally made me turn in another direction."\* Calvin was part of the Roman Catholic Church, so much so that he said that it was "difficult to pull me out of that very deep morass." But by a "sudden conversion," God "tamed and brought to teachableness my heart."

We do not know what experience Calvin refers to and he spends no time examining his own "experience." But "having therefore received some taste and knowledge of true piety," Calvin was "suddenly fired with such a great desire to advance." Within a year, people were coming to him to learn "pure doctrine." This led Calvin to desire the life of an ivory-tower scholar, contemplating the intellectual study of Christian faith.

## God Intervenes

But God intervened. God used William Farel, the leader of the Reformed movement in Geneva, to confront Calvin,

\* Citations are from *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer*, trans. and ed. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).



who resisted Farel's invitation to work with him in Geneva in 1536. Farel thundered: "You are following your own wishes and I declare, in the name of God Almighty, that if you do not assist us in this work of the Lord, the Lord will punish you for seeking your own interest rather than his." Through Farel, Calvin heard the voice of God.

## **Conflict and Exile**

So Calvin began ministry in Geneva against his will, teaching the Bible. He was later appointed pastor. At Easter, 1538, a conflict arose with the Geneva City Council and Calvin and Farel were banished from the city. Calvin went to Strasbourg, where he wanted to live quietly. But the reformer Martin Bucer threatened Calvin and held before him the example of Jonah, who had resisted God's call. So Calvin continued to teach and to minister to French refugees in the city.

## **Return to Geneva**

When Geneva was confronted with a letter from Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Sadoletto, inviting the city to renounce the Protestant reforms and return to Roman Catholicism, the Genevan leaders turned to Calvin to answer the cardinal. Calvin wrote *Reply to Sadoletto*. It was brilliant, and the new Genevan leaders invited him back to minister in the city. Calvin shuddered. He remembered his ministry there and called Geneva "a place of torture." So it was, said Calvin, that "contrary to my desire and inclination, the necessity was laid upon me of returning to my first post." Calvin returned in 1541 and remained, ministering in Geneva—often in the midst of tumult—until his death in 1564.

## **Calvin's Conversion and Call to Ministry**

- Calvin saw his “conversion” as the work of God, not his own. He did not focus on his own “religious experience” but on the God who gives the gift of faith.
- Calvin’s call to ministry in Geneva was against his own will. It was not his trying to attain “his goal”; it was humble obedience to God’s will for him.
- Calvin’s ministry was not “smooth sailing.” It was filled with conflicts, but he recognized that through them all, God was with him.

## **John Calvin (1509–1564)**

- 1509 Born in Picardie, France
- 1523 Father sends fourteen-year-old son to University of Paris to study humanities and law
- 1536 First period in Geneva
- 1538 Expelled from Geneva; goes to Strasbourg
- 1541 Returns to Geneva
- 1564 Dies in Geneva

# HOW TO AVOID BECOMING THE PASTOR YOU SWORE YOU'D NEVER BE AND BECOME THE PASTOR YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE

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In the Ordination Service, you make nine promises describing three dimensions of this office: preacher, pastor, and person. These dos and don'ts will help you avoid becoming the pastor you swore you'd never be and become the pastor you always wanted to be.

**1 You are a preacher. (“Will you be a minister of the Word and Sacrament in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confessions?” G-14.0405b[4])**

Speech is often considered to be “mere words.” But words have real power to bind and to free, to kill and to raise up. What you say has great effect.

***Don't:***

- Point to yourself as the best example in your sermons. Point to Jesus.
- Talk in general terms about Jesus or salvation, as in “Jesus loves sinners” or “Jesus died for us.”

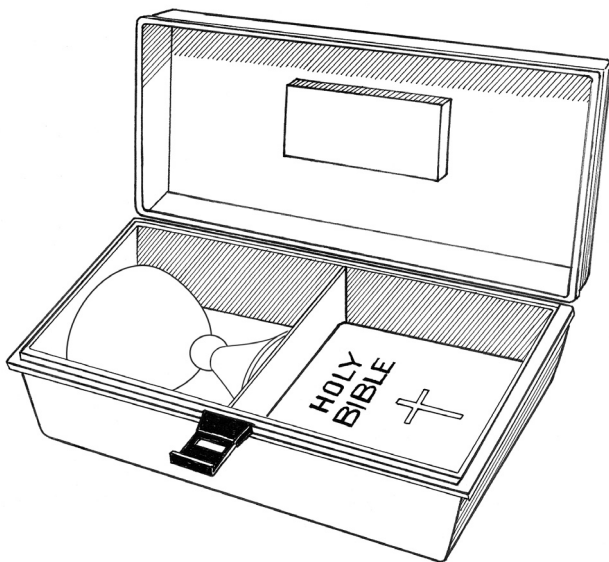
***Do:***

- Talk about Jesus. He is the hero; he is the faithful one. Preach like John the Baptist, who said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

- Take the gospel to your listeners by saying “for you,” as in “Jesus loves you” and “Jesus lives for you.”

**② You are a pastor. (“Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?” G-14.0405b[8])**

“Pastor” can mean “shepherd,” one who watches over the flock, the congregation.



*Don't underestimate the tools of your trade: the Word, prayer, and the sacraments. No one else has tools like these.*

*Don't:*

- Worry too much about keeping people happy. The word “happy” appears nowhere in your terms of call, and this doesn't just apply to yourself.
- Underestimate the tools of your trade: prayer, the Word, and the sacraments. These are not second best. No physician, counselor, or guru offers these life-giving things.

*Do:*

- Remember the difference between who you serve and who you work for. You serve the congregation, but you work for God.
- Stick to the basics. People need what pastors provide—a word from God, prayers, and dependable sacramental promises.

**③ You are a person. (“Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?”  
G-14.0405b[6])**

*Don't:*

- Be phony. You are holy only because Christ makes you holy.
- Be one-dimensional. There's more to life than church stuff.

*Do:*

- Be real. It's OK to be a human being. Relax. Play. Life is short.

- Have a life. That's what Christ has freed you for. Know your family. Stay healthy.
- Pick one time-management tool and use it.

## **Please Note**

- You are a pastor, not God. In the ordination vows you promise to lead a disciplined life in a specific role in the church. But you remain imperfect, just like every other child of God. Pray for help. God will answer. In time.

# HOW TO BE A RESPONSIBLE MEMBER OF PRESBYTERY

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As a minister you are not a member of your local church, but rather a member of your local presbytery. So, while most of your time is spent in your local church setting, you still are to be an active member of the presbytery and be a responsible colleague to your peers. Here are some dos and don'ts:

## *Do:*

- Speak well of the presbytery to your session and congregation. Help your members feel connected to the life of the larger group of churches around them.
- If your presbytery supports local or international mission projects, encourage your members to get involved with and support them. Working together, we can do and be so much more.
- Attend presbytery meetings and be a helpful presence. Pray before the meeting that it will be a meaningful, respectful meeting and all will be heard.
- Wear your name tag at meetings. Count how many times people call you “Hey Pastor” or “Hey Stranger” and remember they’re struggling just like you to remember names.
- Eat the food the local church hosting the meeting provides, no matter how overcooked it is.
- Thank the people who host the presbytery meeting. It’s hard to smile all day and pretend you don’t mind people parking on your grass and messing up your church.



- Be especially nice to elders who come. Since sessions often rotate who attends, elders can feel like strangers, unlike pastors who come regularly. Help them understand how things work.
- Volunteer to serve on committees.
- Keep in touch with your presbytery leadership and thank them for their work.
- Invite the presbytery staff to worship with your congregation occasionally.



*Keep your presbytery leadership informed about how things are going in your setting and, when necessary, your personal life.*

### *Don't*

- Come unprepared to a presbytery meeting and expect to have all your questions answered.
- Show up and register, drink coffee and make your presence known, and then slip out the back door before the meeting begins.