

The Pastor and His Family

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Family life is not unique to pastors. Every Christian is called to family duties for no Christian lives in isolation, apart from a family. Pastors' families are somewhat unique in that a healthy family life is required both to enter into and to remain in the office of the holy ministry. This isn't generally true of secular work. Few employers would terminate an employee who gets divorced, or has an affair, or whose children won't come to church. For most employers, your family life and what you do on your off time is your own.

The fact that pastors must have healthy family lives and must live in an outwardly decent manner is often seen by pastors and their families as a burden. The metaphors mostly invoked are that of "living in a fishbowl" and "double standards." The family often feels they are being watched and judged at every turn. This feeling can create a great deal of fear and stress in both those who desire the noble task and in those who serve in it, as well as all those who love them.

But there are unique benefits enjoyed by the pastor's family that are often overlooked.

1. Time at home.

Most pastors don't work an average week much over sixty hours. Most pastors work closer to fifty hours a week, including Sunday mornings. Since they rarely suffer a commute, that puts pastors at home more than the average working American. Many pastors even go home for lunch, which is practically unheard of in corporate America.

2. Time at work with the family.

Part of the pastor's work includes time with his family in worship. The pastor's family is involved in his work. They not only know his co-workers, understand and honor what he does, but they see him in action week after week. For the pastor, work time and family time often blend. If the pastor's children are in the parish school, this is even more true. Few of those in church on Sunday morning can call worship both work and family time.

3. Time for family when needed.

Pastors have one of the most flexible schedules in America. It is mostly easy for pastors to attend school and church functions with their families. There has never been a more understanding employer than the church when it comes to family values and family time.

Pastors who live in parsonages are also free of the normal chores of home maintenance, again, giving them more time for family.

But what of the pressure of living in the fishbowl? Apart from some unfortunate and isolated instances, the modern church does not actually inflict this pressure on its pastors and their families. In the past fifteen years, we have seen a great increase in pastors' wives working outside the home, pastors' kids being home schooled or not attending the local Lutheran high school, and pastors buying their own homes. So also pastors' wives are no longer automatically expected to teach Sunday School, to belong to the Ladies'Aid or LWML, to sing in the choir, or play the organ. The congregations of the LCMS have simply allowed pastors and their families to make their own decisions.

The feeling of living in a fishbowl is mostly a self-inflicted phenomena. The reality in most places is not much different from being the wife or children of the principal of the local high school or dentist or some other public figure. There can be some pressure. There is a public aspect to the pastor's family life. And the family does have an obligation to love and support the father. It will certainly be noticed if these are glaringly missing. But how the family does that is up to them and congregations are very supportive and understanding, wanting the pastor and his family to be happy in their community.

So also it should be noted that the slight pressure pastors and their families endure is not all bad. The Law works not only to accuse us and teach us. It also works to guide us. All Christians are guided by the Law. Consider the Law's demand that we study God's Word and call upon God's name. The Christian policeman is called upon to do those things as much as the pastor, but for the most part he must do them after work, while the pastor does them as part of his office and employment. He does so for the good of the congregation he serves. But it is also good for him, for the man who serves as pastor. In much the same way, the discipline to be a good family man is stronger for the pastor than the Christian policeman because the pastor's livelihood depends upon it and it is also more obviously related to his being a good pastor than it is to the policeman being a good policeman.

Thus it turns out that despite its challenges, family life is easier in a pastor's house than it is in a layman's.

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