

7 Ways To Support Your Pastor's Spouse

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One of the toughest jobs in the church is being the spouse of a pastor. It has been called the loneliest job in the church. Yet, most church members I know want to support the pastor and the pastor's spouse.

No doubt I had one of the best pastor's wives in Cheryl. By trade, Cheryl is an accountant, an excellent mom and wife. Yet, the demands on her as my spouse have been some of the most overwhelming to her in the 21 years I have served in the pastorate.

Still she always handled her role with grace and a smile. In full disclosure, Sunday is actually Cheryl's favorite day of the week.

In this post, I want to help churches know how to support and protect your pastor's spouse. **And I realize the terms are different in different contexts** – pastor, minister, bishop, etc. I'm using terms from my context but hope the application is transferable.

Thankfully, we have mostly been in a good church environments, as far as the way our staff and spouses are treated. Plus, we came out of the business world into ministry. We were older and more seasoned by life, so we've always approached things differently. For example, we protected our personal time more. We knew we had to even if the church didn't.

I know, however, because of my work with pastors that many pastor's spouses are facing burnout, a sense of loneliness, and some even struggle to come to church. This should not be.

7 ways to support your pastor's spouse:

Do not put too many expectations on them.

Regardless of the church size, no one can be everywhere, at everything and know everyone's name and family situation and still carry out their role in her family. They simply can't. Don't expect the spouse (or the pastor) to be super-human.

Do not expect them to oppose their spouse.

Naturally they will be protective of their spouse. (Hopefully, you understand as you would equally protect your spouse.) If you bad mouth the pastor the spouse is likely to respond in a way you don't want them to, but should expect them to. Don't put them in a situation of having to defend their spouse. That's never a fair predicament and causes unhealthy tensions.

Protect them from gossip.

Check your motives in what you share. Don't share what you don't have permission to share. Don't pit the spouse in the middle of drama. They likely do not need to know all the "prayer concerns", especially the one really just shared as a way of spreading rumors.

Help them protect family time.

The pastor is pulled in many directions. The family understands the nature of the job. Life doesn't happen on a schedule. Yet, in reality, there are often unreasonable demands on the pastor and they always impact the family.

If you can, limit your demands to normal working hours for the church and the pastor. Send an email rather than calling at home if it's not an immediate concern. It will help the pastor have a family life.

Include them without placing demands or expectations on them.

That's the delicate balance. The pastor's spouse is often one of the loneliest person in the church. The spouse doesn't always know whom to trust and often is excluded from times, which are "just for fun".

Cheryl can usually tell when someone has an agenda they want to push rather than simply wanting to be her friend. Don't be afraid to invite the spouse but if they say no to your invitation don't hold it against them either.

Never repeat what they say without permission.

Ever. If the pastor's spouse happens to share personal information with you about the church or their personal life, keep it to yourself. Always. There will be temptation to share their words as "juicy news", but you will support best by remaining silent. Over time, you will build her trust and her friendship. Most pastor's spouses have been burned before by what they thought they were saying in confidence.

Pray for your pastor's family.

Daily would be awesome, but certainly as much as needed or they come to your mind. There really is no better way to bless a pastor's family than to pray for them.

As a bonus suggestion, if your church really wants to honor the pastor's spouse, find ways to give the family time away from the church. This is probably what they need most.

Feel free to give a shout-out to your pastor's spouse here and share practical ways you can honor your pastor's spouse. If you are a pastor or pastor's spouse, I would love to hear your thoughts.

(Closing note: I've been told numerous times, since I first posted about this issue, that in certain churches the pastor's spouse IS the problem in the church. Or that they stir or keep stirred the problems in the church. That's the subject of another post, but I do understand and recognize that there are times this is the problem. It is very difficult for a pastor to be effective without a supportive spouse.)