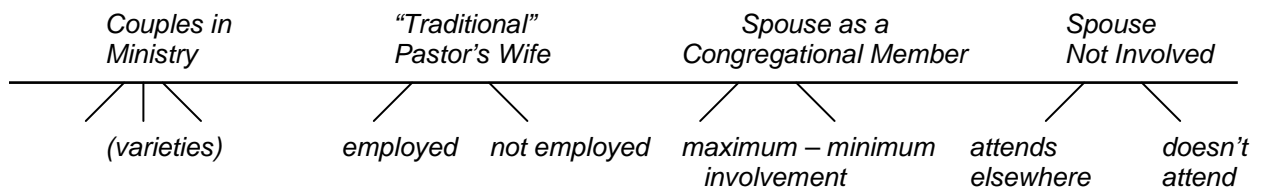


The Pastor's Spouse

How does the pastor's spouse relate to the pastor's job? Every pastor's spouse is unique, with unique interests and vocations. It is frustrating and inappropriate to assume that one spouse will be like the previous pastor's spouse or one in another church. There are many different ways for a spouse to engage with the pastor's calling. They cover the range that is noted below.



Each of these possibilities has its own advantages and challenges. Experience has shown that any scenario can work and that any one can be problematic. It is important that the pastor and spouse are clear and in agreement about their intentions and that there be understanding, acceptance and support from the congregation for that intention.

A male spouse may precipitate responses and expectations that are different than a female spouse. One reason for this difference is the long tradition of the "pastor's wife." The male spouse may or may not be employed full or part-time out of the home or may be in charge of primary child care. Because this pattern is new to many, there is an added need to discuss questions around roles and expectations of the pastor's spouse.

- A. Beginning with the first interviews in the search process both the pastor and congregational representatives must seek clarity and consensus on expectations of the spouse. The prospective pastor and spouse should describe their calling, interests and expectations and the search committee should express its initial expectations. If there are differences between these assumptions it is necessary to negotiate an agreement that can be affirmed by the congregation and by the pastor and spouse.
- B. The Pastor Congregation Relations Committee should meet formally with the spouse annually or as often as it is felt necessary to update expectations and to help provide for the congregation and leaders a continuing awareness of the spouse's role and contributions.

In these conversations the following topics should be considered: (1) the spouse's role (e.g., in terms of the continuum above or specific responsibilities); (2) how the spouse feels about the pastor's calling and role and about congregational attitudes and actions relating to the pastor; and (3) how the pastor relates to the spouse's vocational calling and role in the home with family? Often the spouse also has a demanding leadership or ministry role, the significance of which needs to be understood. Specific items for discussion might include the following:

1. Formal and realistic provision for volunteer assistance and reimbursement for expenses incurred when the spouse is expected to be involved in the pastor's work.

This might include items like child care when attending weddings or visiting members, entertainment expenses for hosting church visitors. In some cases it would be additionally appreciated if these expenses would be paid to the spouse rather than to the pastor.

2. Encouragement and financial support for the spouse to attend some appropriate pastors' workshops, pastor/spouse retreats, conferences and other meetings can enhance the spouse's involvement in the ministry and provide a larger support network that can be crucial to the spouse's well-being. Likewise, travel subsidy to permit the spouse to join the pastor in some church travel assignments will be appreciated.
- C. Housing concerns or where there is a parsonage, the arrangements and issues related to that should be discussed. This might include maintenance and remodeling needs and congregational expectations.
- D. Different couples have different understandings with respect to the sharing of work-related confidential information. It is much better to clarify these assumptions at the outset than to deal with problems later. The pastor and spouse should clarify between themselves what their expectations are. The Pastor Congregation Relations Committee should also know what the assumptions are and confirm that the congregation would be comfortable with the agreed level of sharing.

(Incidentally, it is important that expectations around handling confidential information be dealt with in the orientation of *every* new elder, deacon and lay minister—not just new pastors.)

With proper attention to the concerns of the pastor's spouse, the pastor's ministry will be enhanced to the benefit of the congregation, the pastor and the pastor's family.

Adapted from a publication of the Pastorate Project
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