



Pastor Appreciation Month: 8 Ways to Care for Your Pastor this October – and All Year Round

Congregants make a big difference in the well-being of their pastors – for better or for worse.¹ The pressure of pandemic pivots and social divisions puts pastors at a high [risk for burnout](#) right now. If you are thinking about how to show care during Pastor’s Appreciation Month or during a difficult season, here are 8 ideas that can help increase your pastor’s well-being all year round.

01 *Support healthy boundaries.*

Pastors speak a lot about God, but they are still human. It can be easy to expect God-like availability from them, which strains their time and well-being. Invite your pastor to put their hours in their email signature and a sentence of their Sabbath practice. Advocate for a dedicated work phone so they can disengage from work each day. With other parishioners, acknowledge how you feel about your pastor’s modeling sabbath – support spoken casually and regularly can shift expectations and culture.

02 *Volunteer at church.*

Pre-pandemic, 40% of congregants volunteered; now, just 15% do. Ask a member of your ministry team what the biggest needs are – they might not be the obvious needs – and sign up to take a turn. You can even sign up with a friend – your ask might be just the nudge they need into deeper ministry, and you’ll be recruiting one more person to help lighten the load.

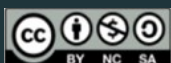
03 *Give financially.*

Gift cards with a note that specifically lists what you appreciate about your pastor are great – really and truly appreciated. Good health insurance, if your church can fund it, is even better. Other workplace benefits that pastors often lack: paid time off (sick time, maternity or medical leave, vacation time), retirement savings contributions, and education or professional development funds.

04 *Invite a speaker to your church leadership board to teach about the stresses of pastoral life and how to counteract them.*

Board members often shape the compensation and benefits of pastors, which has major implications for a pastor’s well-being. More culturally, these leaders can become the best advocates for the pastor within the congregation, which in turn relieves the pastors of some of the pressure of communicating what their boundaries are and why they are needed. Alternatively, you can bring this to your board yourself: use the [Clergy Burnout Report](#) or [podcast season](#) and the [Resilience Report](#) to prepare or to share with leaders.

We’d love to hear your experience of this resource. Email transforming@theseattleschool.edu, subject: Resources.



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05 Ask to lead a congregational team for participation in the Transforming Faith Communities program.

This free, year-long training and coaching program for congregational teams mobilizes congregational identity for neighborhood mission. *As part of the program, congregations become eligible for grant money to fund a neighborhood initiative*, and pastors may be able to earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs) or pastoral study leave for this program.

06 Stock their freezer.

Ask what foods they/their family enjoy and if they have any dietary restrictions, then provide freezer meals. The stresses of pastoral life impact those around them, and helping pastors' families feel supported in tangible ways is one way to offset that stress and to remind them that they're also members who receive care from the church. Tip: send food in containers you don't need back, so they don't have to organize what dishes go back to who; pick up a dish at the thrift store.

07 Host a training in conflict resolution and collaboration for congregants or the leadership board.

Pastors say that conflict and criticisms are two of the most chronically stressful parts of the job.

08 Provide time for them to participate in a peer group.

Isolation can be a big issue for pastors, especially if they work solo or with a part-time team. While friendship with congregants is helpful, pastors also need other pastors who understand the sensitive situations that come up in church leadership to provide emotional support and practical wisdom.

Why does Pastor Appreciation matter so much?

It's hard to be a pastor right now. Maybe you've seen the statistic that almost half of pastors have considered leaving ministry in the past year – or maybe you've already had a pastor leave.² Maybe you've noticed that your pastor has been talking a lot more about the need for volunteers at church – or maybe you already know that volunteering in churches fell by 62% in the wake of the pandemic and that pastors are scrambling to pick up the slack.

“Be a source for compassion and positive change in your community.”

The good news is that what you do as a congregant really makes a difference.

Many research studies have shown that supportive congregants have a significant impact on the well-being of clergy.³ For just one example: in a study Zickar et al. (2008), priests who indicated that they had high levels of support from their lay staff and congregation had higher levels of job satisfaction and were less likely to be affected by role stress, role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity.⁴ So show your care this October – and year-round – by gifting your pastor with resources to build well-being and by being a source for compassion and positive change in your community.

¹Literature Review of Clergy Resilience and Recommendations for Future Research. Sielaff, A. M., Davis, K. R., & McNeil, J. D. (2020). Journal of Psychology and Theology. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091647120968136>

²<https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry>

³For example, Bloom, M., Flourishing in ministry: emerging research insights on the well-being of pastors.; Cloer, S. (2016), The Minister/Elder Relationship with “Churches That Work.”; Proeschold-Bell, R.J., et al. (2016), The glory of God is a human being fully alive: Predictors of positive versus negative mental health among clergy.

⁴Zicker, M., Aziz, S., & Balzer, W. (2008). The moderating role of social support between role stressors and job attitudes among Roman Catholic priests. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 38(12), 2903-2923.

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