

# 25 QUESTIONS **EVERY YOUTH MINISTER SHOULD ASK**

CHAD LANDMAN

# INTRODUCTION

It happens to the best of us. You're so eager to get into that new job that you overlook some of the details about said job, details that would have been important to know, and when you find out that that isn't the way things work at that congregation, you might be upset. So from the start, in the interview(s), things need to be discussed. Some of the things in this book are things Elders and congregation leaders have never thought about. This was designed to help you at least try to alleviate some of those concerns.

Remember, churches finding a new youth minister usually go through a process, and it's sometimes long. A congregation will usually set up a committee, then accept applications for a month or so, and then narrow down those applicants to 10 they think they really want. Then, they will have two or three top guys they'll offer the job to, after probably two or three interviews.

Here's what you *don't* do though - you don't ask all these questions in this book right off the bat. Some of these questions are 3rd and 4th inter-

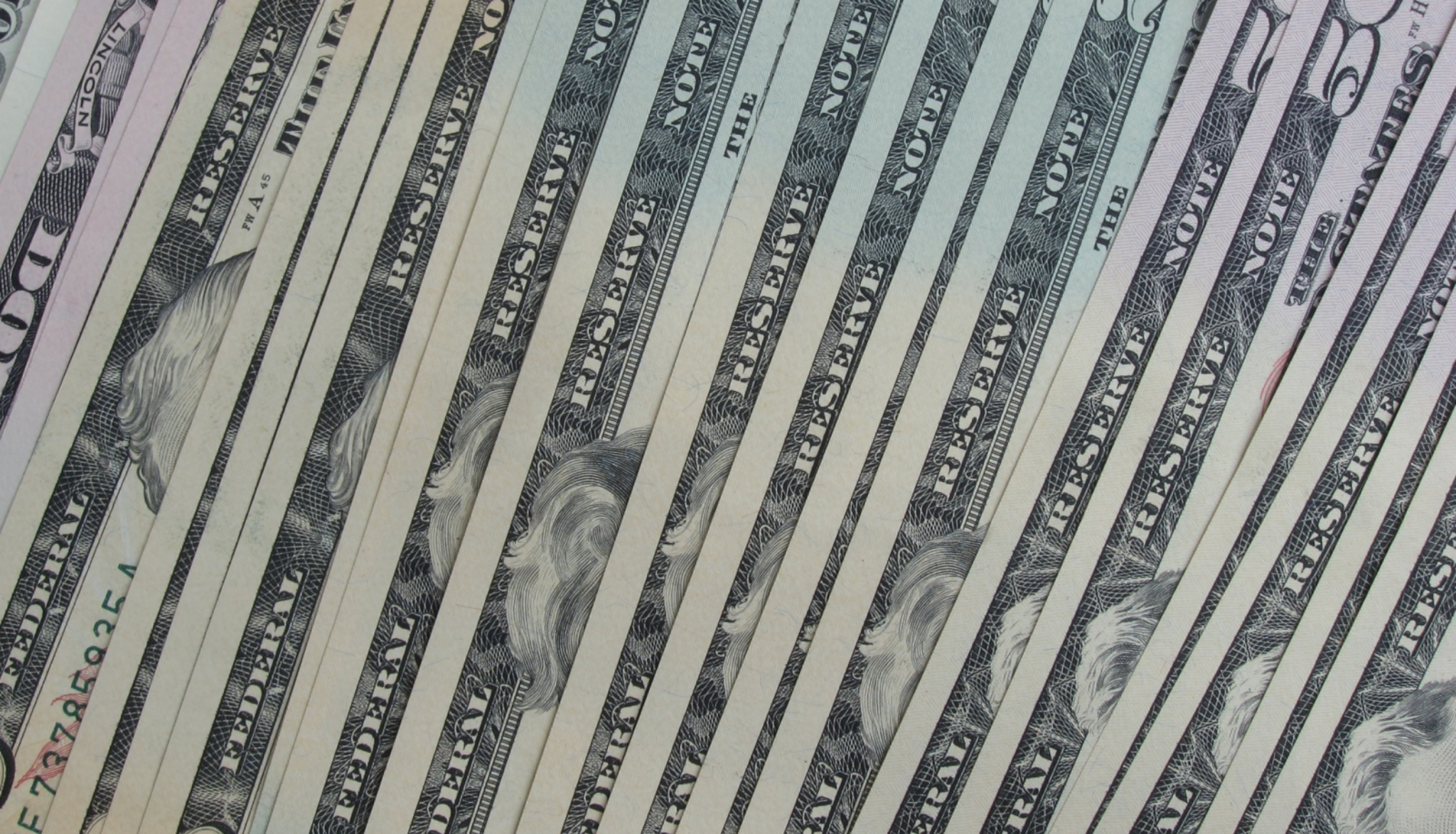
view questions - very few of them will you ask up front in the 1st interview.

This book does not by any means answer all the questions, and I'm sure there's many things I didn't think of to put in this book. But I hope this will be a guide to start a discussion about several things that need to be talked about in your job.

This book isn't just for youth ministers looking for a job, it's for all ministers, whether you're looking for a job or not. I hope that you'll read this whether you've been in ministry for 10 months or 10 years and find some insights within.

I hope you find this book useful, and I wish you the best possible experience on finding your next (or first) youth ministry job.





# 1

## WHAT IS THE COMPENSATION FOR THIS JOB?

We hate to ask this question. It makes us feel awkward, and it makes us feel as though it's all about the money. It's not, and we know that, but this question needs to be asked first and foremost. Because if you don't get this information up front, the rest of the questions don't matter.

It's all about taking care of our families. No matter how passionate you are, how motivated you are you influence young people for Christ, none if it matters if your family lives below the poverty line, or worse, you can't pay your bills.

One major problem ministers run into is paying off student loans. My advice with this? Be up front with your Elders. Let them know the amounts of monthly payments. Lots of Elders are businessmen, and they understand costs, loans, and paying off debts. If you can't live on what they want to pay, request more. Give Elders a budget of every item in your expenses so they can see that you're responsible and aren't just requesting more money because you want more money. Most youth ministers with less than



5 years of experience aren't even in the position to negotiate salaries. On the flip side of that, most youth ministers are grossly underpaid for what they do, so make sure you're not going to be underpaid for your work, even if you don't have much debt or don't have a family to provide for. Abilene Christian University releases a *Ministers Salary Survey* every year that is also a great resource to compare and you can even come up with a competitive salary if your church has never hired a youth minister before.

### **Parsonages**

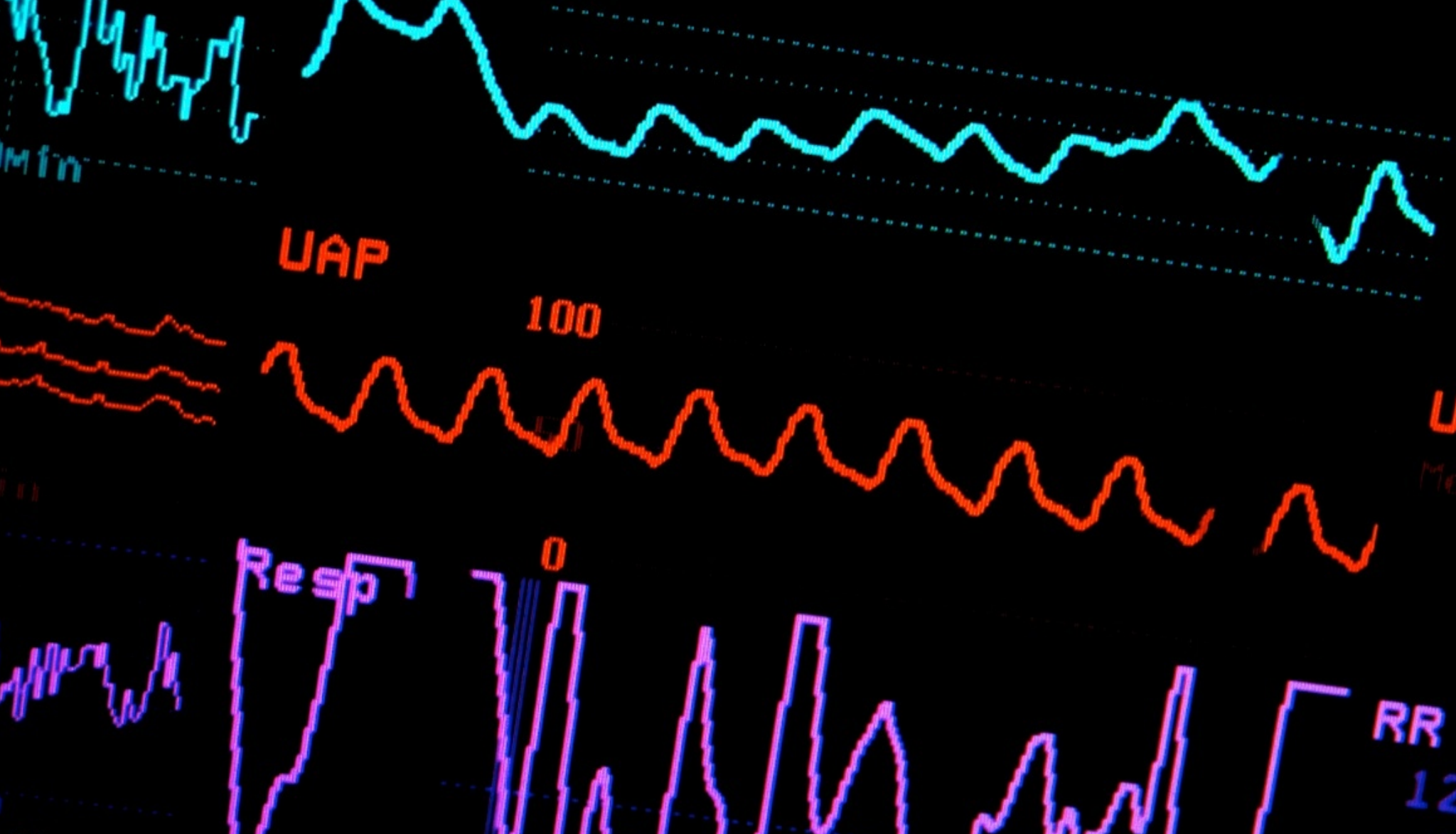
One thing to also consider is if a parsonage is included. This could be a house or an apartment that the church provides free of charge. If the church you're interviewing with provide this, you can expect to be paid \$7,500-\$10,000 less per year. Do the math: a standard house payment could average \$850/month, and that's \$10,200 per year. This isn't counting utilities for the house, of course, which most churches will make you pay for even if the house is free.

Without going into too much about it, privacy may also be a concern if the house very close to the church building. You can set rules and make sure people know where you stand on drop-in visits. You are also not the church maintenance manager - you cannot and should not have to unlock the building every time someone needs it. Even members of the church will abuse you if you prove to be available for these things.

### **Taxes**

Also don't want to go into too much detail about ministers and taxes, but you should educate yourself on how minister's taxes are done. Find yourself a tax professional with experience in doing taxes for ministers. Your housing allowance could significantly lower your reported income to the IRS. For example: if you get paid \$50,000 a year (yeah right, I know), you can use a big chunk of that as your housing allowance, which includes things like cable and internet, furniture, cleaning supplies, and many other things. \$10,000 to \$15,000 of that income can be taken off the top and not counted as income reported to the IRS. Consult a tax professional - don't try to work those things out for yourself. Paying a pro \$250 a year for your tax work could save you two grand...and a ton of headaches.





## 2

### IS MEDICAL INSURANCE INCLUDED? WHY OR WHY NOT?

If you don't think medical insurance is a big deal, then you're either still in college or you're one of the few individuals who is privileged enough to have medical insurance at your job.

Medical insurance, especially if you have a family, is a *huge* deal.

If you're reading this and have never ventured out into the work force before and are still in college or whatever, odds are you've never had to worry much about going to the doctor. I have two very opposite experiences with this.

I was in the US Marines for 4 years. I never once had to worry about going to the doctor, because everything was covered. Dental, vision, health, even life insurance - all were covered and were just included in my service to the military.

Currently, I work for a church that offers no health benefits (except for accident coverage, which I will cover in the next chapter). So I have to buy what is called individual medical insurance instead of

being part of some group coverage. Apparently, I'm considered in the minority.

Group health coverage is very common. This is offered at lots of jobs, government jobs and those connected to the government especially. With Obamacare on the horizon for 2014, people don't really know which way medical insurance costs are headed, but most agree that costs will go up.

And that's bad news. For me, and for all those working for companies who offer group insurance. If costs rise, more people are going to be like me, trying to find individual insurance because their company nixed health coverage because the costs got too high. We'll have to wait and see.

But I digress.

The bottom line is to make sure you know where your congregation that you're interviewing with stands on health coverage. If they don't offer it, ask why not. And if they haven't thought about it, ask them to think about it.

Most churches won't want to shoulder the extra cost of providing health insurance, and since most churches don't have big staffs (the minimum amount of employees is 5 in most places to get group health coverage), most churches just leave it up to the individual to get their own coverage, which can be expensive. Group coverage itself isn't cheaper, it just seems more reliable in the insurance industry for some reason.

Most of us will fall into the 80% category of churches that don't have a large enough staff to even get group coverage, and then the church has to provide each individual with health coverage on a separate plan. But for the other 20%, those churches need to look seriously at providing health coverage.

Most congregational leaders don't think about it, and that's because most of them come from a business background where health insurance has never been a big deal. A church could see the cost and say "No way" and not give it another thought.

In my experience, I would be willing to take a pay cut in order to get good health coverage. So it's a very important discussion to have with the church you're interviewing with.





# 3

## IS ACCIDENT INSURANCE INCLUDED?

I once sat down with a youth minister friend to eat lunch one day. We didn't talk all that much - he was a little left of center doctrinally for me, he lived almost 45 minutes away - but he was one of the few youth ministers in the area I could talk to. Of course, I asked him how he was. He said not too good.

He went on to explain about how he'd injured his back a couple of years ago, and repeated attempts to correct it weren't helping. The medical costs, even though he had insurance (not through his church), were beginning to pile up. He was taking some pretty heavy medication that made me wonder if he should even be driving.

I didn't think much of it, and said something like, "Bummer man, I hope things get better for you."

And then he said something I'll never forget.

"I just wish my Elders would at least help pay for it, since it happened on the job."

He had apparently been horsing around with kids, like us youth ministers do, and had injured his back at a lock-in.

I was astounded. His Elders weren't helping pay for it, even though it happened on the job?

Do not be confused - accident insurance is not the same as medical insurance. Every business, church or otherwise, is required by law to have some form of accident insurance for all employees.

For instance, you're driving the church bus to fill up with gas before an event and a truck hits you. What happens then? Who pays for the hospital bill if you have to go? Is your personal car insurance reflected, or is the church's?

When interviewing with a church, it's important to know that they're not going to leave you high and dry with a pile of medical bills to take care of if you get injured doing something for the church. Most churches won't - and most churches have a policy in place for this very thing, even if you don't have to use it but once every five years.

Accident insurance is in place so that if you hurt yourself on the job that you will be taken care of. But we all know that youth ministers never do anything that they could get injured, right?

Right.





# 4

## WHAT AGES / GRADES DO THE YOUTH GROUP ENCOMPASS?

If you're being hired as a youth minister, you're basically being hired to take over an entire ministry. Sometimes this includes, but is not limited to: Education & Curriculum, the Youth Committee, outreach ministries, young men- and women-specific ministries, and family ministries.

The reason to ask this question is because it will affect everything you do. It will affect your work week and how you allocate time between specific tasks. It will affect your home and family life because of different events with different groups that are scheduled. And it should affect you in deciding to take the job.

The reason I would ask this question is to see what specific grades I will be responsible for. Some youth groups go all the way from 4th-12th grade, others start in 6th or 7th grade. You need to know what you're getting into when you are going to be asked to take over an entire ministry.

Too often ministers get sucked into what I like to call the "Associate Minister Mentality." The AMM is an illusion that many

churches have used for years. They want to hire a youth minister, but what they really want is someone who will also be a Children's Minister and part-time Pulpit Minister as well. And, mark my words, if you try to do all that, you will burn yourself right out of ministry.

(In the next chapter, we'll discuss more about numbers and how many ministers a church should technically have.)

We fall into this trap because of the passion we have for our jobs. It's not just a job, it's spreading the Good News of Jesus to everyone, and sometimes we feel that we should never stop working and never stop trying to spread the Gospel.

Don't get duped into being the only guy that does everything. Everyone has their roles. Yours should be to do what you were hired to do, not to work yourself to death over a couple of years and then be totally ineffective in ministry for the rest of your life.

In the coming chapters, we'll talk more about time off and roles and responsibilities.





# 5

## HOW MANY YOUTH ARE ACTIVE MEMBERS?

Don't get me wrong on this subject - I am a *quality over quantity* guy any day of the week. I get fed up with members, parents, and Elders who are constantly worrying about numbers.

But the truth is that numbers matter. A lot.

In his book *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, Mark DeVries advocates that every church should have a 1 to 50 ratio, meaning if you have more than 50 kids in the youth group, you should have at least two ministers.

I've been a part of many ministries, both in full-time jobs and internships. Some churches were big, but most were small. Odds are you will never have to worry about getting another minister because you have so many kids.

I did work at a church that averaged 3,500 members on Sunday. Their Children's Ministry was an operation in and of itself. There were tons of teachers and volunteers. The ministry hired four interns every summer to teach and help out. But yet, there was only

one minister. One minister to oversee events that sometimes had 350 kids at them.

I understand that budgets are problems. An extra \$30-50,000 a year to pay another staff member isn't what most churches can afford, but if you look at the megachurches, the churches with 2,000 or 3,000 members, most times they have a staff that is in proportion to that size.

When you ask how many kids are in the youth group, you need to know *active* members. Kids who come often. You might even ask for a list of names or a breakdown of ages. "About 30 kids" is not an acceptable answer here, especially if you're applying at a bigger church with a bigger group. You need exact attendance numbers so you can get a feel of what you might be dealing with. Most Elders and people you'll interview with won't have these numbers prepared. Ask them to. How can you think about taking a job without knowing how big it's going to be?

Another question you might ask is how attendance is viewed by your leadership. If you have a few Sundays where not a lot of kids show up, are you going to be brought in for questions?

There are tides in youth ministry, as I have found out in my limited time in the profession. Some years you will have lots of kids of all ages, and some years you won't because you just graduated 12 seniors from high school. Elders and leaders may not be aware of these waves and tides in youth ministry, and just by the natural way your families are arranged, you will have up and down years.

Bottom line, you need to know how many kids are going to be there when you take the job, and how many kids the leadership expects of you in 1, 2, or 5 years from now.





## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE STATE OF YOUR YOUTH?

This is a very complex question, which is going to get you some looks. As a point of advice, I would never ask this question alone, by itself, or without some explanation. You might add things like:

- Where is your youth group spiritually right now?
- How long have they been without a youth leader?
- Were there any bad feelings between them and the parting youth minister?
- What would you say some of my main obstacles will be if I take this job?

Every January, much like the *State of the Union* speech the President gives to Congress and the rest of the country, I like to give our parents and members a *State of Our Youth*. Whether it's in a sermon format on a Sunday night or in an open letter to the church, I want everyone to know where the youth group is and where I personally hope it's going in the coming year.

This may be a question that needs to wait until you decide to take a job, but certain elements can be asked in an interview as well.

- What background are most of the kids from?
- What area of the country is this in?
- Is there one high school in the community or many that the kids attend?
- How involved are the kids in church leadership?

All of these questions factor in greatly with what you have to do in order to plan events, camps, or retreats and lots of other things.

Another big question that I would seek out is the current state of the youth minister himself. Did he leave on bad terms? Is he helping find the next youth minister? Or was the change a welcome one from the church because the current youth minister was getting stale?

You will fight the demons of the past youth minister at your new job for months, if not years. You will constantly hear “Well that’s not the way we’ve done it before” or, on the flipside, you’ll hear awful things about the previous leadership because of things that happened before they left.

Youth Ministry is a process, and a long, hard slog. Results don’t come instantly, and once the newness of you wears off, what will people say? You will constantly battle the “You’re not as good as the last guy” or “You’re way more awesome than the last guy” statements from your kids and parents. You may have no connection with your upper high schoolers. I’ve found that generally, the

older they are, the less accepting of you they will be when you come on to the job. There are factors at work that you will never see - the previous youth minister may have left a trail of destruction - and you’ll spend a year just picking up the pieces.

I say all this because it’s very important to know what you’re getting yourself into. If the previous guy was an up-and-coming superstar, you might have some pretty big shoes to fill and you need to make it clear to your parents and kids that you’re not that guy.





## WHERE DO YOU WANT TO SEE THIS YOUTH GROUP IN FIVE YEARS?

In his book, *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, Mark DeVries makes a strong case that youth ministers shouldn't be superstars that come in and save the youth group in some magical way. He says that instead of the *let's-put-it-all-on-the-youth-leader's-shoulders* approach, building a sustainable and effective youth ministry can take up to five years of really hard work, not just from the youth minister but from every volunteer involved.

So when you ask this question in a an interview, you're bound to get vague answers. Things like "We want every kid in the youth group to be a Christian" or "we want to have 100 kids in our youth group." These are good goals to have, but what's the plan to get there?

The basic unspoken answer: hire a new youth minister and he'll do all that for us.

I was very fortunate to come into my job where I work currently and have a phenomenal support system of volunteers already established. That has not only made my job easier and less stressful



and extremely more enjoyable, but it has helped our ministry grow.

It wasn't necessarily public information, but when I started this job I put together a five-year plan. I had ten specific goals I wanted to accomplish every year of the youth ministry, and that plan is currently on track in its third year.

Every one of us has a passion for what we do, or else we wouldn't do it. We come into new jobs with more new ideas than we can possibly get around to. But as the marathon runner says, pace yourself. You shouldn't start 3 new ministries or projects in your first 90 days on the job.

This factors into lots of other questions in this book, but the bottom line is you need to know what your Elders, parents, and teens expect of you before you get there. Likewise, you need to let them know that this is a process - a marathon, not a sprint. Parents and Elders that want instant results are going to be disappointed.

Work with your youth committees (more on committees later as well) to craft a clear long-term vision for your church's ministry. A youth group without vision is a youth group without direction. A youth group without direction is going nowhere.

On a side note: your parents and volunteers need to be praised from the beginning on how much they mean to the youth ministry. They need to know and be told that they are a vital part of this work. Don't make the mistake of letting these things go unspoken - make sure your volunteers know that they are appreciated.



# 8

## DO YOU HAVE A YOUTH COMMITTEE IN PLACE? WHY OR WHY NOT?

I never knew the importance of a youth committee until I had one.

The importance of a youth committee - just a group of individuals, parents, Elders, and Deacons, who are passionate about the ministry - cannot be understated.

They provide a sounding board for problems and issues. They give insight to planning and preparing for events big and small. They help in volunteer fashions to get other people involved in the ministry.

Youth Committees, in my research, aren't common. Most churches have a youth parents planning group or something of that nature, but I've found most churches don't have youth committees.

I came from a church that didn't have one to a church that did, and they had been in place for years before I came. They were the ones responsible for hiring me. And that's what usually hap-

pens - churches form committees to find the next youth minister in a hiring search only to dissolve said committee after the youth minister has been hired. In a sense, every church at one time has had a youth committee.

You *need* a youth committee, plain and simple. When I came to my current job, I'll admit I was pretty turned off to the fact that I would have to answer to a youth committee. I didn't want them nosing into my job and telling me what to do. But it's not like that.

Our youth committee meets four times a year. That's it. Once in December to plan the next year, once before our big retreat in March, once before the summer, and once after summer after the kids have settled in school to discuss fall retreat and other fall plans. We have special meetings as needed, and I meet with the Elders on a regular basis and give them updates

Especially if you're starting in a new ministry, implore your Elders and leadership to form a youth committee. Your ministry will be better for it, and your committee members will help bring in more volunteers.





## WHAT IS THE CURRENT YOUTH BUDGET?

This one may seem simple, but it's really not. (You're starting to realize that none of these questions have simple answers - welcome to youth ministry.)

You can tell a lot about a church by their youth budget. How much are they willing to invest (not *spend*, mind you) on the youth group? Is every transaction questioned? Are things like ballgames and meals included in my pay, or do they come out of the youth budget?



10

## WHAT IS YOUR POLICY ON OFFICE HOURS?

I like my office. I'm a little OCD about my office. It's my sanctuary, the place where I can read and think and study and really get things done. Modern-day ministers have always struggled with one thing though - balancing office time with out-of-the-office time.

At the church where I work, there are clear roles. We have a family minister who does most of our visiting. We have a pulpit minister who does 99% of the preaching and visits our members often with our family minister. We have a hispanic minister who preaches and visits the hispanics in our congregation. We have a secretary who handles the bulletin, payroll, answering the phones, and other tasks too many to name. That leaves me with the youth.

I am literally left alone to focus on the youth.

Which, by the way, is *wonderful*.

I'm not asked to preach often. I'm not asked to go on visits often. Kids don't get sick or go to the hospital too much, but when they



do, I am there. I teach classes three times a week to our teens and middle school, and when I'm not doing or preparing for that, I'm planning the next retreat, event, or camp. I have plenty to do and I am thankful beyond measure that I have the leaders that I do and the clearly defined roles that they have enforced to allow me to *focus*.

That being said, this is not the norm.

For most of us, being the youth minister means we're the associate youth minister too. We preach on a regular basis and make visits too. We're the tech support for the church, fixing audio and computer problems. We're sometimes (hopefully not) the education directors, in charge of pleading with people to teach classes and organizing lesson materials. This is the norm, because most churches are not blessed with staffs such as the one I work for, and we're only a medium-size church.

I don't have any numbers to back it up, but I would say that 60-70% of youth ministers work in congregations with less than 300 members, and most (80% or so) work in youth groups with 15-30 kids. You probably fall into this group.

And as far as office time goes, it is completely up to your leadership to enforce policy.

But know that someone will always say you spend too much time in the office, while the other side will say you don't spend enough.

The reason I bring up responsibilities and roles is because this greatly affects office time. What are you doing while in the office? Are there set hours

you must be there during the day? Is there a staff meeting once a week? Do people expect to hear mine or the minister's voice when they call the church?

I do not have a leadership that sits on me and demands that I be in the office during certain times. But if I abuse that privilege (and yes, it is a privilege), then someone will start asking questions.

Our jobs as ministers take us many places, and most of our connections are not made inside the confines of our offices. For me, it's at ballgames where I connect with parents and students. For our family minister (who visits most days and is hardly in the office once a week), it's with the sick and those in the hospital.

Bottom line? You just need to talk to your leadership and make sure that office hours are flexible and will allow you to do the real work in your ministry, and that's connect with your parents and kids.





# 11

## WHAT IS YOUR POLICY ON SPOUSE INVOLVEMENT?

At present, I find myself in a precarious situation.

Where I was previously a youth minister, it was just my wife and I. We were far from home, we had little to no friends our age, and the girls in the youth group were magnetized to her. It was wonderful. She was able to help those girls in lots of ways.

The first week I took the job at my present congregation, we learned that my wife was pregnant with our first child. My wife planned to be a stay-at-home mother, and nine months later, we had a beautiful baby boy.

My wife feels guilty because so much of her time is monopolized with our little boy. If you've had your own children, you know this. My wife also feels guilty because she felt like she went from being super-involved to almost not involved with the girls in our youth group in my present job.

The good part is that my Elders don't expect my wife to be involved. She is, to a certain extent, but her priority is raising our little boy.

You need to know where your Elders really stand on your spouse's involvement in your ministry. Do they expect her to teach a class? Do they expect her to run a girls-specific ministry? These are things you need to know.

I hate to take a hard line on this one. But the church hired *you*, not your wife.

That being said, your wife shouldn't be completely uninvolved, but your family has to be a priority. Most ministers run into this problem when they have children, and if your wife has taken a lot of responsibilities in the youth group or in the congregation, people may be put out when she drops out of those activities to take care of your home. We don't like to admit it, but people quickly forget what it's like to have one or two kids (or more!) running around the house, and how time-consuming of a job that really is.

Ask this question. Your Elders may not have thought of it, and they may give a vague answer like "We expect a degree of good involvement with our young people," but you don't want them to get upset if your wife has to turn down teaching a class in order to be able to take care of your kids.





# 12

## DO YOU OFFER A CELL PHONE PLAN OR PAY FOR A CELL PHONE?

This may seem like an overkill question, a question that really doesn't need to be asked. But the fact is that if you're a youth minister, you're going to be spending a lot of time on your phone.

If your church is not going to offer a cell phone plan and provide you a phone, then they need to at least pay for it.

I'm big on technology. One of the few requests that I had when I took my present job was that I could pick my cell phone. I knew I was going to be spending a lot of time on it texting kids and talking to parents, not to mention looking up directions on youth trips. So I was going to have a phone that I trusted, not some dumbphone from 2003 that was passed down by the previous two youth ministers.

For the most part, asking this question isn't a big deal. It's only a big deal if you *don't* ask it.

There are several questions you have to ask yourself.

### **If they are providing a phone:**

- When does my current cell phone contract expire?
- How long is the term for the new phone?
- Do I get to pick my phone, and is that also paid for?
- Will I get to upgrade my phone in two years, and is that paid for?
- What happens if I am mid-contract and decide to leave for another church?

I would highly recommend against adding your wife to the cell phone plan of the church as well. I've seen this go badly for lots of ministers, because if you're fired (God forbid) or if you choose to leave for another church, neither of you have a phone and will have to both get new ones. At least if you leave abruptly, one of you will have a phone.

I've experienced the cell phone stuff both ways: at one church I had my own phone and they paid for it, and at my current job I have a phone provided for me on the church's plan and they also pay for it.

If given the choice, I would recommend getting your own phone and having your church reimburse you for it, because that way you won't have to get a new phone number if you move jobs.





# 13

## WHAT ABOUT FUNDS TO EAT WITH KIDS AND OTHER EXPENSES?

This question and the next one closely tie in with one another. This is important to ask because you will be spending a lot of time with your kids in your youth group.

We've talked (and joked) about how youth ministers pay, and how they don't exactly get doctor's salaries. If you go into the ministry without a plan to cover expenses like eating out with kids, then you may find yourself in a small financial hole.

Asking this question gets us far into the business side of ministry. Your congregation needs a plan for your expenses. Any other person in the world who works for a company or corporation gets their expenses covered while on a business trip.

That retreat this weekend? Business trip.

That college visit with kids? Business trip.

Taking the kids to play laser tag with pizza afterwards? Business trip.



In case you haven't caught on, you should not be using your own personal funds to buy food (or gas, or supplies, or lodging) for a *business trip*.

That being said, hopefully most churches are smart enough to realize this as a need and they have a plan.

My church provides a credit card from a local bank with my name on it and expects me to use it any time I have a business expense. The good news is that I can use this card to purchase food, books, or supplies for a retreat if I need to.

But a funding system like this does not come without accountability. I have to keep up with every receipt, and any special purchases over \$250 must be explained. I keep a spreadsheet every month on what I spend that helps me keep track.

I don't know what the limit is on my church credit card, and frankly I don't want to know. But knowing that my business-related expenses are covered on all my youth trips is a very comforting thought, especially those months when the bills may be a bit bigger for the family and money is a bit tight.

Bottom line: have a plan. Whether it's a credit card or a reimbursement system, have a plan. Some Eldershops may not realize that this is a need or don't think they should have to appropriate the funds to something like this. But you need to have access to at least a little money when you're on youth trips, otherwise the shock of filling up the church bus with \$150 in gas can really put you in a bind.



# 14

## ARE EXPENSES AT YOUTH EVENTS AND GAMES COVERED?

This one is closely related to the previous question, as I said before, but this kind of funding is a bit of a different animal.

If you're a new youth minister, you need to know that you'll be spending a lots of time at sporting events watching kids in your youth group or just supporting the local high school team with your kids. And with that comes some cost.

When I was in high school, I remember paying \$2.00 to get into a game. Some games like soccer and baseball were even free. This was just 15 years ago.

Now, ticket prices for ball games of all types rival movie theater ticket prices. It's kind of ridiculous.

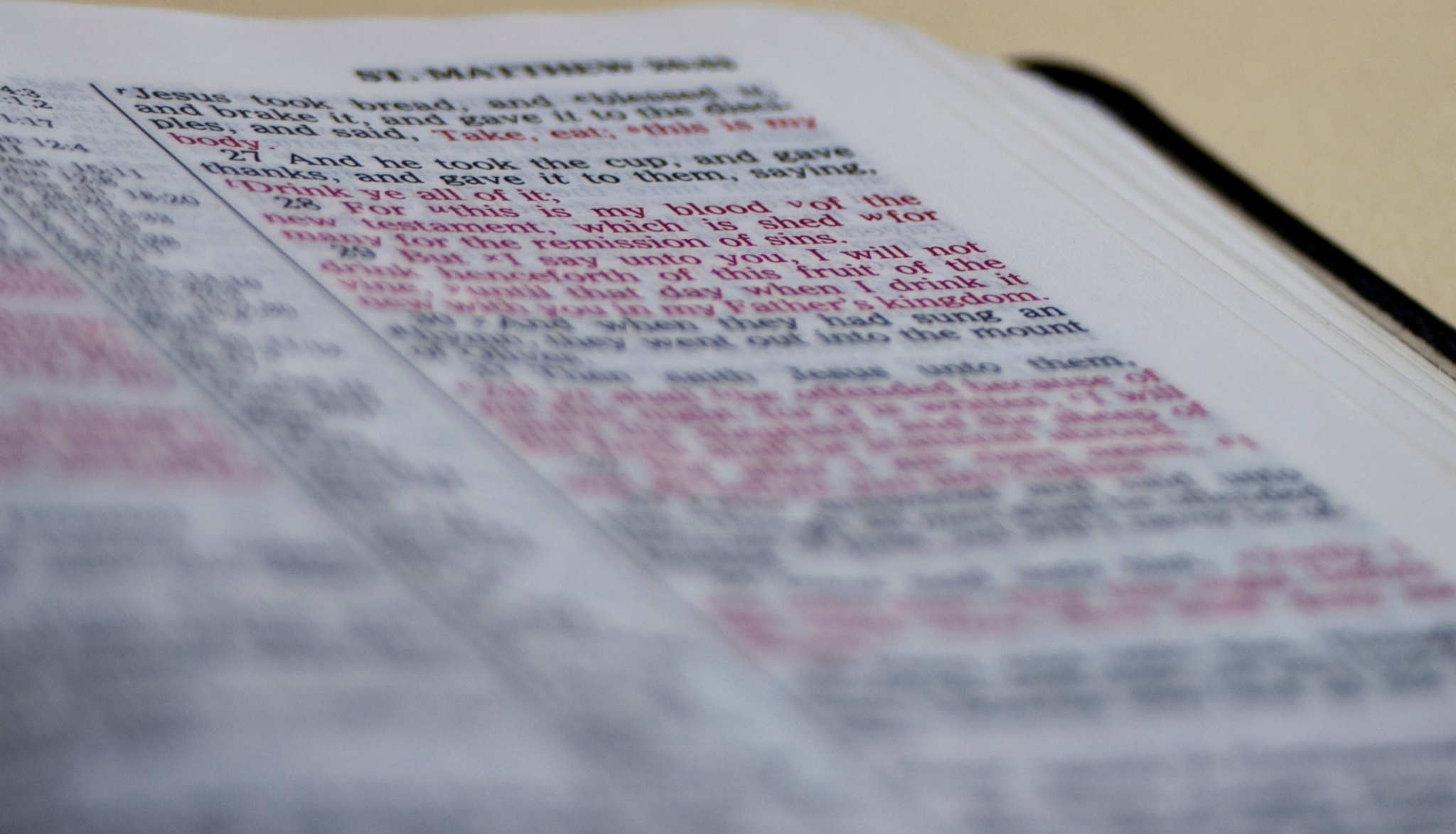
In my ministry here, I try to attend at least one game a week. It's \$5.00 across the board to get into games, no matter what sport, and \$7.00 for playoff games. If you take that \$5 price at once a week, that's \$20 a month, or \$240 a year. That's a month's car payment.

The problem we run into is that most schools (at least not in my experience) don't take checks or credit cards, just cash. So that church credit card we talked about in the last chapter doesn't help you at all in this instance.

There is also another option: work out a way with your local school to get a youth minister pass to all the games, either for one flat fee that the church provides or for free. With state sports regulations regarding sales of tickets and admission prices, this one may be difficult but not impossible to do.

So, again, have a plan. Talk to your Elders about expenses in this area, because you connect with parents and kids outside Sundays and Wednesdays.





# 15

## HOW OFTEN WILL I BE ABLE (OR BE ASKED) TO PREACH?

This is a big one, and the attitude you have regarding this question is important.

I'd say there are three categories of youth ministers when it comes to preaching:

- 1) You want to preach every chance you get, or have a regular schedule to preach every week,
- 2) You only want to be the "fill-in" guy, preaching when the pulpit minister is on vacation, or
- 3) You only want to preach a few times a year, if that.

Speaking for myself, I fall under # 3.

I say that because I've had the experience from all sides on the relatively short amount of time I've been in ministry.

If you are in a position where you're a fill-in preacher when the regular minister is out, you may want to be cautious and discuss up front with your Elders just how much preaching you will do.

do. That's especially true if you work alone with another pulpit minister and he is out for speaking engagements or other business. During high-stress times like the summer, this can be problematic.

Sometimes I have found myself preaching more than I wanted to, and not focusing on the youth like I would like to. You may be torn between the two. While I welcomed the experience of preaching at the time, looking back I realized that it took too much of my focus from the kids.

Let me just say this: preaching is *hard*. Sure, pulpit ministers do many other things - weddings, funerals, visitations - but the bulk of their job is to prepare two full-length sermons every week (maybe more), and sometimes even a class on top of that.

To pile just the job of preaching a sermon on Sunday on top of all your other youth minister duties, planned or unplanned, is too much.

If you're reading this and you're a youth minister looking to move into pulpit ministry (or what some jokingly call *real* ministry), then good for you.

But don't be the youth minister that really wants to be a preacher.

If you want to preach, that's wonderful. You should want to, at least a little bit. It's good to get up from time to time and keep your speaking skills sharp. Because teaching class to teens Sunday morning and preaching in the pulpit are two very different things, as I'm sure you would agree.

If you want to preach, though, go out and get a preaching job. There's plenty of churches that are looking. But if you're going to be focused on the youth ministry, focus on the youth ministry.

For some of you, you don't have this luxury. You've been made an "Associate Minister" or some other job title like that. All those job titles mean is that your Eldership can pile on you more than you can handle. And you will eventually burn out.

It's a good idea to have (in writing) when you will be preaching. It's important that both you and your Elders understand when you'll be preaching. If the policy changes (like if a pulpit minister leaves and you're asked to preach more), that needs to be talked about and renegotiated as well.

A good Eldership will recognize that everyone has their roles, and that yours as the youth minister should be the young people.





# 16

## WHAT ARE SOME ADDITIONAL DUTIES THAT WILL BE REQUIRED OF ME?

Big question. *Huge* question.

Not to sound cynical, but what do you actually want to do? Do you want to be a youth minister with lots of other titles tacked on, or do you want to focus on bringing young people to Christ?

I must confess that the idea of piling on additional duties on a youth minister is very frustrating for me. But I've found that clear and concise communication helps a lot in this instance.

Right now, I serve as the youth minister at the congregation I work for. I am also the web administrator, VBS director, Fall Festival and Trunk-or-Treat coordinator, and I serve on the Missions, Audio/Video, and Education committees.

What you didn't see in my additional duties was things like Associate Minister. Education Director. Or Building Maintenance man.

I talk about boundaries more in an upcoming chapter, but I just want to touch on additional duties here.

I am very fortunate at my current job, as I've probably stated before. When I took this job, my Elders told me flat out that I was not here to preach, to be the building maintenance man, or the education director. I was here to focus on the young people and bringing them to Christ. They have lived up to this statement.

So many of us though, don't have this luxury. I am blessed to work with a great pulpit minister, Hispanic minister, and family minister, all of which have clearly defined roles. Most of us are not so fortunate.

For most of us, it's just us and the pulpit minister. In that instance, roles need to be clearly defined.

I keep mentioning Education Director because it's such a hard job. If you have a deacon at your church who takes care of this for you, count your blessings. A youth minister friend of mine once told me that being the education director and youth minister was the worst job in the world.

Some people feel that since you're the youth minister that you're also part-time maintenance guy for the church. For example, every time someone needs the building unlocked, your phone rings.

I live less than 25 feet from my office in a church-provided home. I love it. I would hate it though if I hadn't been smart and set guidelines for people while I'm living there. When I arrived at this job, I asked people to never just drop by, to call before they came over. I also felt it was important that I was not the universal door-unlocker guy either. This sounds mean coming from someone who lives so close, but it can really ruin an evening

when have to come back into town after driving down the road for 15 minutes to let someone in the building because your number was the only one they have.

It's also never a good idea for you to be the only one in the church with a Commercial Driver's License, otherwise known as a CDL. I was told at a church that I worked at that I needed to get my CDL to drive kids around in the bus. I then said I would be more than happy to go get one, provided four or five other men from the church went with me to get it, because I was not going to be the only one with a CDL and get stuck driving to all sorts of things. We never went, by the way.

As in everything in this book, it's important to be up front with your Elders about any additional duties that will be asked of you. Because if you don't find out before taking the job, you may be shocked to find out all you are "supposed" to do when you get there.





# 17

## HOW MUCH VACATION TIME DO I GET PER YEAR? HOW MANY SICK DAYS?

Vacation time is always one of those things that should be pretty straightforward, but sometimes isn't.

Basically, you need to know what days count as vacation days. For example, at my current workplace, my day off during the week and Saturdays do not count towards my paid 15 days off per year. So if my day off is Thursday, and I take a Wednesday to Wednesday off to go on vacation, I actually only used 6 days of vacation. Sunday counts as a workday (which it really should, if you think about it).

A little advice: take your vacation time. Most churches will not allow you to accrue days off and use them in one massive sabbatical. Usually if you have days off left at the end of the year, you lose them.

As it pertains to attending conferences (more about conferences in chapter 21), you should not have to use personal vacation time to attend a conference that is for your job. You're essentially work-

ing while at that conference and your family vacation time should not be used for that.

Also in question are sick days. You need to know how sick days are handled. Where I am, I accrue 1 sick day per month. Your Elders' policy may be different, but there needs to be a policy in place so you don't spend your last 5 days of vacation recovering from the flu.

If you have a young family or are looking to start one, you may want to ask about maternity leave as well. Most businesses give dads one to two weeks of maternity leave. Churches should be no different. Trust me, you'll want that time off with your wife when you have a new baby in the house.

Make sure that you're keeping an accurate record of all time off, including vacation, sick days, or maternity leave. Don't expect the Elders or the church secretary to keep up with that information, and even if they do, you need to compare records every few months.





# 18

## DO I GET A DAY OFF DURING THE WEEK?

You will be extremely blessed to have a day off during the week. If you're reading this and you're a full-time minister and you have a day off during the week (and you use it), good for you. If you don't have a day off granted by your Elders, it's time to start asking questions about one.

Lots of ministers struggle with a day off during the week. Most of us are workaholics and think we need to be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You don't. And if you're like me and you're very strategic with your day off (I take mine on Thursdays), then you avoid a high-traffic day like Monday or Friday and can actually enjoy your day off.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of a day off during the week. If you don't think Sunday is a work day for ministers, you're a little crazy.

Having a regular day off during the week lets you recharge. Make it known to your staff or secretary and your Eldership that this is

the day that you intend to relax. If there's something that can wait until the next day, it can wait until the next day.

I let my youth group parents and kids know that my day off is Thursday, and for the most part, they respect that. Sure, there's going to be emergencies. There's going to be big ballgames or surgeries that you need to be at. But you need to stand firm on your day off and make sure everyone knows that's your day with your family.

Some advice: if you have been blessed with a day off, *take your day off*. If you don't, it will cease to be a day off.





# 19

## HOW MANY CLASSES PER WEEK WILL I TEACH? AND WILL I GET A BREAK?

How many classes you have to teach will directly affect your workload every week. It's hard to plan and write classes 3 or 4 weeks in advance because you forget what you studied. So for me at least, writing and studying for classes is done no more than a week prior. You need to know before you go to a congregation on how many classes you'll be asked to teach.

More importantly, you also need to know when you'll get a break from teaching classes. The kids don't always need to hear you in class, no matter how much you think they do. They need a break from you as well. This is where it becomes important to have a small cadre of teachers that you trust and are dependable. It has helped me to co-teach a class on occasion, knowing that I could lean on the other guy to teach for me when I needed a break.

One of the biggest mistakes I have made and continue to make is teaching too many classes. For the longest time, I had never even attended an adult Bible class. That should not be so. You need to be fed as well. You need to be strengthened and hear classes

from someone other than a speaker at a youth rally. By doing so, you will make your teaching better in the long run.

Like many other things in this book, you need to have a plan. A plan for other teachers to teach, and perhaps even a plan for you to teach an adult class from time to time to see the other side of the coin.





20

## HOW OFTEN DO I GET TO MEET WITH THE ELDERS?

For most of us, meeting with the Elders is a bad thing. It's like being called to the principal's office - we only get called in when something goes wrong.

In my opinion, this should not be the case. The Elders are the shepherd of the congregation - they have their hand on the pulse of the church. They often know a lot of things that you don't know about. And keeping them in the loop with the youth ministry will be extremely important.

One of the best parts of one of my previous jobs was meeting with the Elders for two hours every week. That seems like a lot, and it seems like it would get in the way, but I was able to, on a regular basis, meet and discuss with them the various ins and outs of the church there and see how they made decisions and take part in their thought processes.

Most Eldershops are not so open. Most only want to meet with you when something is wrong.

You need a regular meeting with your Elders, and regular communication with them. Even if the face-to-face meeting is only once a quarter, you still need to. They need to be informed on situations in the ministry and you need their wisdom to help with said situations.





# 21

## WHAT IS YOUR POLICY ON CONFERENCES OR WORKSHOPS?

Go ahead and Google 'youth ministry conferences' and you'll find that there are many to choose from. Odds are that you have been to a conference before and greatly benefited from it.

The point I guess I'm trying to make is that you need these conferences to go to, to reconnect with friends and to ignite your ministry in various different ways.

If you're not a conference or workshop attendee, become one.

If you think you don't have the time to attend, make the time.

Most importantly, make sure that your Elders understand how much you need to go to these events. You can get all sorts of ideas and insights everywhere you go. You can connect with people that can greatly help make the ministry you work with. And your Elders need to know that this is an investment to the ministry at the church.

After every conference I attend, I prepare a detailed report about what I learned and how I intend to use it in the ministry here, so

that the Elders can see the benefits of my attendance. Is this time consuming? Yes. But you never want to take advantage of the blessing you have to attend these conferences.

I have two conferences (or retreats) per year that I attend, along with a monthly meeting with youth ministers that I attend as well. I can't tell you how much of a blessing to me and the ministry it has become. It is only a blessing because I don't have to fight for it. If I had to go to some of these conferences on my own dime, I couldn't do it. But my leadership sees that this is a form of on-the-job training for me, and it is an investment into our ministry and what we're trying to accomplish here.

Getting together with other ministers keeps us focused and energized. If you're not doing that, you well on the way to burnout.





# 22

## WHAT IS YOUR POLICY ON ADVANCED DEGREES?

I once talked to a man who worked with a church and he told me that he wasn't allowed to pursue an Advanced Degree, even in ministry, while he worked at that congregation.

"Why not?" I asked.

He proceeded to tell me that the last four ministers of that church, after getting their degrees, moved on to "greener pastures" six months after getting them.

The Eldership of that church had been burned.

You may encounter this situation in your ministry. Elders are not willing to let you pursue that advanced degree because they think you will leave soon afterwards.

Put yourself in an Elder's shoes. What would you say to an aspiring young man that you like having as your church's youth minister if he comes to you wanting to pursue an advanced degree when other ministers have left after getting theirs?

Now, I'm not telling you never to pursue a higher education, on the contrary - a master's degree in counseling or divinity can be extremely helpful in ministry. But you must go about it in the right way, especially if your Elders have been burned before in situations like this.

Talk with your Elders before starting any advanced degree program. If you're in the middle of a program and are going to another church, make sure your new job knows and is okay with you working on your next degree. I've even heard of some ministers negotiating with their Elders to pay for their degree so long as they commit to time with that congregation.





# 23

## HOW DO YOU INTEND TO PROTECT ME WHEN I AM ATTACKED?

If you read the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians, you'll see how Paul has been attacked. He's trying to put out fires, and in verse 6 he has to go on the offensive.

This is just one example of how Paul is being attacked. Paul was also attacked physically as well, something we should hope to never have to deal with.

Please know this: you may or may not be aware of it, but you will be attacked. Storms will come. Someone will say something false about you or blame you or the youth for something. A parent may conspire with other parents and go to the Elders about you. Any number of things may happen, but the expectation must be there in your mind that you will be attacked in one way or another. It will be beneficial to you to be prepared when that day comes.

But how?

If I haven't made it clear in this book already, I'll say it again: the relationship with your Elders or Shepherds is extremely important.

It may be the most important relationship you have at your job. And being transparent with them is also of paramount importance. Being clear on objectives, events, meetings, problems, and other things cannot be underestimated.

Which is why, in this instance, you need to know that your Elders have your back.

The last thing you want is to be the last one to hear bad news. You don't want to be called into an Elders meeting and be caught off-guard.

It may be a hassle informing your Elders on a regular basis, and they may not always get your messages or emails, but you have to keep them in the loop of what is happening in the ministry.

Elders are men too, and they make mistakes, and there will be disagreements. But one thing that you have to remember is that God has placed those men in those leadership roles, and it would be wise of you to keep them informed and defer to them in difficult circumstances. If you have an altercation with a parent, inform your Elders. If you have a class coming up where you think someone may object to the content, inform your Elders. It's best to head off any difficulties you see coming so that you can at least try to minimize any damage that might occur. Sometimes it's unavoidable, and sometimes you'll never see it coming. But if you can be wise and think about various things in your ministry and keep your Elders on the up-and-up, then you'll be in a far better place when the wolves move in.





# 24

## WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT TECHNOLOGY NEEDS?

You hear it all the time: “Technology moves at a rapid pace.” That’s because it does.

Today’s youth ministers find themselves using technology in their ministries more than ever before. Why? Because the kids connect to that. They’re constantly on their phones and tablets and they’re more connected (and you can argue *disconnected*) than ever before.

If your church doesn’t have a web presence, an app, or a Facebook account, count yourself as behind the technological curve.

As the younger guy, you’ll probably be asked to do something with current technology at your church. For most churches, a website that was designed in 2002 with a domain name you can’t remember is their “technology initiative.” Things have changed so much in the last 5 or 10 years that youth ministers are almost forced to keep up with tech to keep their ministries relevant.

If you didn't take any website design classes in college, you're not alone. The good news is that you can find a wealth of information on the internet about teaching you how to manage social media and technology for small businesses and churches. I myself have training, both official and unofficial, in web administration and help anyone I can in the church or at other churches.

If your church has needs, whether its a new website or building an app or putting sermon audio on the web, find someone to help. Other youth ministers can be very tech savvy and a great help to your ministry.

It's also a good idea to get a feel for what a church already has in place when you interview with them. Do they have a dedicated youth website or Facebook page? Do they have an internet ministry that you'll need to provide regular content on? These might be good things to know when looking to work with a congregation.





# 25

## WHAT IS YOUR TERMINATION POLICY?

I doubt you'll come across a church that doesn't have a termination policy. But if you do, the conditions need to be clear and up front about what will happen if and when you are given the axe.

I don't want to speak flippantly about this, and I hope you never have a situation where your Eldership tells you that you need to go. But in the case of moving on to another job or getting fired from the current one, you need a policy in writing about what will happen.

If you're fired: Will there be any severance pay? How long will I have to leave? What will happen to my parsonage or my cell phone contract? Or medical insurance? Or IRA?

If you decide to leave: How much notice must I give in advance? When will be the last time I get paid?

There's lots of things to think about when moving to another job, and getting fired or told you need to leave from a current job could be devastating.

We've all heard the horror stories about preachers and youth ministers being fired. Some of us have been part of those horror stories. The truth is that you need to be prepared for the loss of your job. Some Eldershops are not exactly reliable when it comes to moving jobs or firing someone. There needs to be a clear policy in place about all sorts of details upon you leaving the job. This policy should be reviewed at least once a year.



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