

GETTING STARTED AS A BISHOP

There are a number of factors to take into consideration when taking up the role of bishop.

◆ **Becoming Acquainted with the District**

Even though you may have been somewhat acquainted with the churches in your district, there are new depths of acquaintance and trust that you will want to develop. One of the best ways to build trust is to learn as much about each congregation as possible without passing judgment on the way things are done or making many suggestions for change. First, earn the trust of the congregation, then make suggestions for change.

Be sure to read the written history of each congregation. If there is nothing committed to writing, interview the persons who have been influential in the life of the church. Familiarizing yourself with the past can help you to understand the current state of affairs in the church. Also, obtain copies of any important congregational documents such as constitutions, bylaws, covenants, and other papers with legal implications.

It is helpful to receive copies of all worship bulletins, minutes, and other significant data on a regular basis.

◆ **Learning from your Predecessor**

Be sure to arrange times to be alone with your predecessor to discuss various facets of congregational and pastoral life. Ask him to relate stories or anecdotes that reveal the character of each congregation or pastor leader.

◆ **Arranging Individual Visits with Ministerial Individuals or Couples**

Taking the time to meet individually with pastoral leaders will help to build confidence and trust. In these more intimate settings, you will learn to know these individuals on quite a different level than in district meetings.

Not all persons will have equal interest in meeting with you. Learn to flex with the needs of individuals. Some will be satisfied with an occasional phone call. Others will thrive on regular meeting times, perhaps weekly or monthly. Generally, you will spend more time with those who are getting started or in transition, than with those who are in normal circumstances.

◆ **Getting Acquainted with Conference Resources**

Acquaint yourself with conference resources. Do not try to "reinvent the wheel" by developing all of your own resources. Particularly as you begin your work, ask lots of questions. Inquire of other bishops about the way things have been done before simply striking out on your own. You are not the first to walk this road.

◆ **Finding the Support you Need**

Find a support person or group to whom you can be accountable. It is helpful to find an older bishop who has walked the way before you, as well as a fellow "novice" who can empathize with your situation. Deep friendships are often forged by experiencing difficult situations together.

Recruit a circle of friends who can pray for you each day. Let them know your schedule and your needs. Praying friends are the greatest asset to ministry. Neglecting to cultivate networks of prayer is like forgetting to put wood in the stove in the midst of a blizzard. You will die for lack of warmth.