
Effective Interpersonal Relationships in Christian Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal relationships among church staff are an inescapable reality for all who work in Christian organizations, and improving them is the responsibility of effective, efficient leadership. It is in the context of these relationships that both the church staff and the entire congregation find fulfillment in gathering for worship. However, interpersonal relationships are both negative and positive, with implications for the effectiveness of the people around, the congregation, and the ministry's growth. A minister with this tendency must possess the appropriate skills for productive relationships among congregations; he should be able to apply them effectively for excellent, rewarding results, with an understanding of the complexity of human nature. An understanding of the concept of interpersonal relationships existing among church members is to improve the positive interpersonal relationships expected among the people in the church and its implications to attract the divinity from the transformational perspective of the ministry¹

A minister's life is all about Interpersonal relationships; they are present in all areas in which man operates. It is a personal skill with which man is born, but it must be developed more

¹ Olubukola Olabode, Improving Professional Church Staff interpersonal Relationships; Transformational Perspective, Faculty of Education, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, Nigerian. *Advances in Education and Philosophy Journal*, Middle East Publisher, Dubai, 2020.

than any other skill in a minister's life. God himself laid the foundations of human relationships in Leviticus 19:18, He commanded man to love the neighbor as himself. The word "neighbor" is derived from Latin, which means "Proximus", "humanity". The Apostle Paul spoke more about human relationships in Chapters 12 and 16 of the book of Romans. The teaching concerns the various duties and behaviors of the Christian and his relationships with others, and it directly addresses aspects of good human relationships. Vital ministry centers on Jesus Christ and in relationships among the team members. The health of any ministry is directly related to the quality of relationships among its team members².

OVERVIEW OF RELATIONSHIPS

Every institution, including the church of God, is established and sustained by relationships. Every leader is aware that relationships are a fundamental and intrinsic part of human existence. The minister should acknowledge that human interactions are fundamental to life, giving meaning to creation and to understanding existence; hence, leadership activities that focus on the technical and bureaucratic elements of an organization would be devoid of meaning. Ministers should be conscious of their leadership style and behavior when working within the church environment, as interpersonal relationships play an essential role in the sustainability of any organization. Interactions can be both negative and positive, yielding negative or positive interpersonal relationships among members. Invariably, understandings of positive interpersonal connections are associated with better individual and work-related outcomes, thus promoting a united, loving, and refreshing community of God demands godly relationships. (Psalms 133:1-2). Church leadership demands knowledge, skills, and everything at its disposal to uphold the mutual covenant, build, and improve

² Stanley E. Ott, The Seven Thread of Ministry team Relationship, The Vital Church Institute, Pittsburgh, 2016

the interpersonal relationships among members and the church community at large. Therefore, improving the interpersonal relationships among church members, family members, and the community from a transformative perspective will enhance harmony, progress, and growth in the community of faith.

Relationships

Relationships can be either primary (expressive ties) or secondary (instrumental ties) (Adeniran and Nihinlola, opines that relationships are a corporate responsibility of both the minister and the members. The leadership's desire to create a conducive atmosphere for building effective relationships cannot be overemphasized. The workability of relationships depends on the minister-member's possessing unquestioned loyalty toward each other and the church, and diligence and hard work in fulfilling assigned responsibilities Hyles further asserts that public appreciation encourages relationships and helps ministers be more active and more productive in their work. The spirit of unity should always be exhibited by the ministers in their various responsibilities. Self-interest, tribalism, sentiments, undue rivalry, bitterness, and pride should be avoided in godly relationships³.

The Biblical Perspective of Relationships

There are biblical principles that apply to various kinds of relationships, such as those between God and man, between man and God, and between people, such as husband and wife and member relationships. The Bible admonished the principle of mutual submission and accountability between the members and the minister. Abraham with his 318 men (Genesis 14:1-16); Jacob and Laban (Genesis 29: 15-29); Moses and Jethro (Exodus 2: 21-22; 3: 1); Moses, Aaron, Hur and Joshua (Exodus 17: 10); John Baptist with his disciples

³ Olubukola, 2020

(Matthew 9: 14); Jesus Christ with his disciples called apostles (Matthew 10: 2-4) Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry, he established the priority of a relational ministry from the beginning and he was continually taking the first steps to initiate a relationship even among his disciples in John 3: 22 Spader and Mayes further assert that Jesus's effort to build relationships with people was such a prominent pattern in his life that his enemies tried to use it to discredit him (Matthew 9: 11; Luke 15: 18).

The Necessity of Relationships

The importance of relationships cannot be overemphasized. Anderson asserts that group employees refuse job transfers and promotions because they will be too disruptive to personal and family relationships. Adeniran and Nihinlola assert that "the way man behaves is determined in large measure by the relations with one another. They further assert that "Human life stays incurably relational because the relationships control the orbits of life." The characteristics of relationships show that people cannot meet regularly in the same places without a relationship; a relationship cannot consistently work with people without having working relationships with them. Ministerial relationships and etiquette generally find their ideal solution in the precepts of the golden rule⁴.

The effectiveness and fulfillment of the kingdom assignment by the minister depend on how members learn and build one-to-one friendships. Members' commitment is necessary for pleasant, harmonious, and developing staff relationships. Adetunji asserts that members should understand that whatever gifts they use are from God for the edification of the church and for God's glory, not for self-promotion. The general principle is that, the closer the personal relationship, the

⁴ E.J. Johanson, The Minister and His Relationships Efficient Evangelistic Methods and Pastoral Techniques Ministry International Journal for Pastor, Glead generator Publications, 2025

greater the potential impact. Relationships keep each member under the discipline of others.

A relationship enhances both spiritual and personal development; it stands as the basis for mutual encouragement, praying together, sharing personal and family needs, and honesty through adequate communication, and the exhibition of confidentiality will always safeguard the perils of professionalism among members.

It facilitates ministerial and church work. Barrow asserts that good Christian relationships between pastor and members facilitate and improve their work and the work of the church⁵. Relationships promote growth among members and the church. People grow in relationships. Sustainable growth is achieved in members' relationships. The Bible admonishes that "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10: 24). Spader and Mayes asserts that God understands the impact one person can have on another. Proverbs 27:17 buttresses that "As iron sharpens iron, so man sharpens another." Without relationships, there can be no sharpening. The more members' involvement in relationships through contact and relationship building, the greater the depth of church growth and productivity.

It helps build teamwork, and thereby independence becomes interdependence. Teamwork through relationships is needed among the members in the church, and the minister.

Dale submits that a team-building model through relationships helps members get acquainted, divide responsibilities, build group cohesion, heighten morale, increase creativity, and deepen loyalty.

⁵ Simon A Ishola and Francis O. Oladipo, *Effective Staff Relationships as An Impetus for Growth in 21st Century Church*, Faculty of Education, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, *Nigeria Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, International Peer reviewed Journal, 2020.

It helps with problem-solving through the participation of minister-member relationships. Relationships enable collective creativity and managerial skill through members' participation in problem-solving.

It helps and promotes delegation. Relationships help discover and engage potential, skilled members for church ministries.

It broadens individual member understanding, members understanding is widened by having a good understanding of themselves in the areas of value system, self-image, the goal, nature, and work of ministry; areas of responsibilities; church expectations of members; leadership style; church's personnel policies and procedure; and discipline that follow suit of every act of indiscipline.

Relationships help in building Christ-like character among members. It is a significant part of a nurturing environment.

It encourages and enhances mentorship, Spader and Mayes assert that a healthy relationship is directly connected to members' effectiveness in helping themselves to grow as disciples of Christ.

Olson also asserts that through relationships, members will best develop spirituality and strategy in the company of others. Anderson also asserts that good character comes from living in communities such as families, neighborhoods, and religious and civic institutions, where virtue is encouraged and rewarded. In essence, the best channel for developing virtue and a good attitude is through community relationships.⁶

The Minister and his Emotion

The acid test for a minister is the ability to form and maintain a wholesome and happy relationship with the church

⁶ Ishola, 2020

members despite all he may be passing through, without hindrance or emotional interference; that is when the ministry can go a long way.

The word emotion comes from the Latin words “emotion” and “emovere.” It is the state of mind resulting from impressions of the senses, ideas, and memories. It is expected of every minister of God to exercise control over their emotions. Emotion plays an important role in human relationships⁷.

The success of the ministry and the minister depends on maintaining healthy relationships with family members, fellow ministers, and the congregation. The minister’s life and ministry is more than just loving God and hoping to find success. It involves being the best he can be and loving others. A successful ministry requires that the minister be spiritually authentic and then work to connect people with God⁸

A minister is a servant of God who is saddled with the responsibility of building and rebuilding the world with the emphasis on decency, faith, and virtue. It is not enough to preach the themes in the church and society; it is to provide leadership by modeling these principles in the home and society. The Christian husband or wife who is a minister has the mandate to serve as a model to those who are struggling with family and societal challenges and pressures.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A MINISTER

Loving: Love is the mark of a true minister of Christ and is expected to reflect the outstanding character of Christian leaders. Minister can evaluate the degree to which a loving attitude is prevalent in their lives by reference to God’s description of love in 1Corinthians, chapter 13. Some of the

⁷ Jose Luis Jimenez, Ministerial Improvement Institute, The Minister and his Relation, Ministerial Ethics, Blanca rodrgez Publication, 2016.

⁸ Larry G. Hess, The Pentecostal Minister and Relationships, The Pastor’s Role and Relationships, 2022.

virtues associated with love are kindness, patience, forgiveness, perseverance, generosity, contentment, and self-control define a loving minister defines these virtues.

Humble: Humility is an important hallmark of a mature Christian minister. The minister should acknowledge total dependence on the Lord and complete submission to His will. It is perhaps easier to assess humility in man by checking for the opposite attitude of pride, which manifests itself in interactions with others as arrogance, an unwillingness to admit faults, a refusal to accept criticism, and a failure to fully acknowledge the contributions of others to team successes.

Merciful: God's extension of mercy to humanity is the typology of the kind of mercy expected from ministers to people around them; this should motivate a merciful attitude towards others. To fulfill the responsibilities of a minister, to administer justice and address wrongful behavior, to temper judgment with mercy, and to refrain from exacting the maximum admissible penalty for an offence if a fair, but less painful, ruling can be made.

Grace-Filled: God is gracious; he showed his undeserved favour and blessing to humanity. Likewise, ministers are expected to cultivate the same attitude, seeking to be instruments of God's grace to enrich the lives of others, irrespective of the requirements. God's grace is free, but also immeasurably costly. The true mark of an excellent servant of Jesus Christ is that he fulfills his calling to the end⁹.

Teachable: Wise ministers recognize that others are wiser, disciplined, and more experienced than themselves. A teachable spirit will enable them to access and utilize such knowledge. Those who are teachable will be marked by their willingness to listen more than to speak, and by a

⁹ John Macarchur, *Eleven Characteristics of an Excellent Minister*, CPR Foundation, Monergism Publications 2025

commitment to seek wisdom and an openness to consider opinions different from those they currently hold.

Accountable: Ministers are accountable to God for their actions and words; they are accountable to themselves so that we can correct, encourage, and challenge one another. Those who are unwilling to submit their lives to the inspection of their peers or who refuse the needed correction are destined for trouble. Whereas those with a heart to live accountably with fellow Christians reap benefits that help safeguard their ministry effectiveness.

Respectful: A respectful attitude should characterize all Christians, especially those exercising leadership. The temptation to feel superior to others because of status or God-given abilities must be strongly resisted. Recognizing every individual as a person for whom Christ died will help to give due respect to others. Particular respect should be shown to those deserving of special honour or recognition, such as the elderly and godly leaders.

Servant-Leadership: Mature Christian ministers should see themselves as serving the Body of Christ rather than using their position to oppress others. Jesus best exemplifies the attitude of servant leadership, perhaps most dramatically illustrated when He washed the disciples' feet on the eve of His death. Ministers do well when they seek to cultivate this attitude, for it will inspire others to serve willingly and sacrificially in God's Kingdom.¹⁰

MINISTER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FAMILY

The primary society that ministers belong to, which will always understand the minister in what he is passing through, is his immediate family. They are the set of people who need the minister's affection and still need him alive.

¹⁰ The Gospel Coalition, Conflict Management and Pastoral care, Ministry Magazine, Life way Research, Australia, 2020

Minster is expected to reciprocate this kind of love to his family members. The family members are expecting their father, the husband and the minister to fulfill their roles in the following areas;

Be Available: The minister's wife and children expect him to have time for them, just as he does for the church members. Children want to share their minds and needs with their father, and the wife wants to share her burden with her husband. In fulfilling these roles, family members will conveniently support the man. Plan to have an annual family holiday where the whole family can be strengthened and refreshed, strengthening togetherness in the minister's family.

Program regular time slots for relaxation and relational intimacy with the spouse, and try to spend extended time with each child to build parent-child relationships.

Protection: Either male or female spouses are expected to protect themselves from external challenges, especially amid the excessive demands of the ministry and the challenges that accompany fulfilling the ministerial roles they feel called and gifted to serve in.

Love: Ministers are expected to love their wives, as exemplified by Jesus in His love for the church.

Submission: Female ministers are expected to submit to their husbands as exemplified by Jesus in his submission to his Father.

Nurture: Ministers are to nurture their children in the way of the Lord; they should ensure that the children receive the nurture and encouragement they deserve, and prayerfully commit them to God for their salvation, Christian growth, and ministry service. Help the children to deal with the undue expectations and unfair criticisms that sometimes befall pastors' children.

Positive attitude: Ministers should maintain a positive attitude toward their ministerial responsibilities because they are public figures; they have the responsibility of modeling the congregation and encouraging lives in society. Recognize that married couples and families will expect the family to be a model of how a solid Christian family seeks to provide a good example. Allow others to see that his family is not exempt from the worries, problems, and pressures common to most families, and inspire them with the godly way he handles difficult situations. Ensure they meet the financial demands with the spouse's support¹¹.

MINISTERS' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONGREGATION

A minister's relationship with church members is a multifaceted, covenantal bond aimed at spiritual growth, community, and shared mission, often characterized by the roles of shepherd, teacher, and counselor. It thrives on mutual trust, compassion, and open communication, where the pastor models authentic, Christ-like friendship while empowering members to serve using their gifts. Congregations are the people in the parish to whom God sends the minister. The minister is to lead them to accept Christ and to know the love of God for their lives. As the church of God, they need love, care, counseling, and the revelation of the mind of God through the minister to live a fulfilled life. The minister is expected to fulfill the following responsibilities for the congregation;

Teacher and Counselor: The minister is tasked with preaching, teaching sound doctrine, and providing guidance, which involves both comforting and correcting. He is responsible for tending to and feeding the congregation; they depend on the minister for their spiritual nourishment. He is their father, counselor, and burden-bearer; they will always

¹¹ The Gospel Coalition, Conflict Management and Pastoral care, Ministry Magazine, Life way Research, Australia, 2020

look up to him to help them. Circumstances may require the minister to seek assistance from members of their congregation and to mediate their case with God, because he is the intermediary between the church and God.¹²

The image of God: The church want to see God in their minister, they belief that as soon as they see their pastor they are already relating with the person of God, that is why the minister need to exemplify the life of Christ among others and display love, faith and integrity in a way that will inspire and assist them to replicate such life among members.

A Judge: The minister as judge must be devoid of prejudice; all church members are the same; he must prevent acts of partiality in his dealings; he must not allow special friendship or influential members to influence his attitude and give preferential treatment to any member of the church. He must avoid gossip but diligently attempt to stop others from engaging in any destructive behavior in the church.

A Confidant: Confidentiality is the ethical foundation of pastoral ministry; members stop relating to ministers who lack confidentiality. Ministers must maintain strict confidentiality in any counseling setting, unless legally obligated to disclose certain facts or unless failure to pass on information would endanger the safety of others. Confidential pastoral records must be kept, particularly regarding counseling appointments and other sensitive matters, to sustain continuity and relationships.

Hospitality: The minister is on the platform to welcome everyone who comes his way; hospitality is the best way for the minister to build lasting relationships and to gain many for Christ.

¹² Peter W. Rosenberger, *Beyond the Pulpit : A Pastor's Role in Family Care giving, Insight Personal Development, Life Way Resaerch Christian Resources Montana*, 2026

The Spiritual father and the Shepherd: The minister is called to guide, protect, and care for the spiritual well-being of the congregation, nurturing them in faith. He is expected to address the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of the congregation, utilizing the resources of the ministry team and appropriate congregational members to affect pastoral care. He is expected to limit the number of programs and invitations accepted from other churches, since the primary responsibility is pastoring the congregation. Being a minister has an immense impact on the congregation.¹³

Self-discipline: A Gospel minister is not expected to hold membership in any secret society, as this would undermine the trust of those in the church and disrupt his relationship with God, the owner of the ministry. A minister must not abuse the power of the pastoral position for personal gain or to exercise unhealthy control over vulnerable members of the church. *A man without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls." Proverbs 25:28¹⁴*

Friendship: Rather than distant, top-down authority, the relationship is most healthy when it reflects friendship and accessibility, where the pastor engages, laughs, and cries with members.

Empowering Ministry: The minister does not do all the work alone; they equip, delegate, and encourage members to discover and use their spiritual gifts.

Good ministers' relationships will lead to;

Trust and Transparency: Relationships are built on honesty, shared decision-making, and open communication. Members

¹³ Garth D. Thompson, The Minister As a Parent, Department of Christian Ministry at Seventh day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University Berrien Springs Michigan, Silver Spring Publication, 2026

¹⁴ Rick Warren, Areas of Life where Successful Leaders Practice Self discipline, Pastor.com, Magarita, 2026

will always feel free to open their secrets to the minister because they trust his fatherhood.

Mutual Support and Prayer: The pastor prays for the congregation, and in turn, needs the prayers and encouragement of the members. They will easily count on their pastor because they know that he is praying for them.

Conflict Management: When differences arise, a foundation of trust allows for reconciliation. This is strengthened by a mutual desire to bear one another's burdens. A relationship is significant if the minister will speak to his member and stop him from molesting the spouse.

Avoiding Favoritism: The minister should treat all members equally, supporting everyone in their, common mission, members are of the opinion that the minister will always support the influential members, but in a case where the minister has established a family relationship in the church, it will be difficult for favoritism to crop up.

Shared Mission: The focus is on a shared, Christ-centered purpose, creating a sense of being "co-laborers" in ministry. In a good church-member-minister relationship, everybody in the church is important; there is no island of knowledge. The relationship will help the minister carry everyone along, and it will help the members flow with the minister.

Relational issues

In the context of interpersonal relationships, power can be defined as the ability to influence others. Powerful

people can change or sway other people's behavior, attitudes, values and ways of thinking. Sometimes, powerful people can even influence others' livelihoods and their physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial well-being.

Ministers are powerful, influential people in the Church. As a result of their ordination or profession, people pay heightened attention to what they say or teach and to what they do. Sought or unsought, power comes with being a public person in the Church and must be exercised mindfully and responsibly. Scandals occur when power is misused or abused¹⁵.

Ministers are open to people of all kinds in the parish. The major groups who will always need the minister's help are women and children; in such cases, it is expected of the minister to be wise in his relationships with his people, to maintain the sanctity of ministry.

Cautious relationships: The minister needs courtesy in his relationships with people, particularly with dangerous members of the church who may mastermind evil, especially those in charge of money. They will manipulate things and give the minister little money, then blow up his name as the perpetrator. He should recognize the danger of entrapment in co-dependent and overly closed relationships and avoid the appearance of wrongdoing that could affect his ministerial assignment.

Avoid closed door relationship with the opposite sex: Counseling is part of ministerial assignment, but the fact of the matter is that not everyone that come for counseling actually need counseling, especially the opposite sex, some are having ulterior motive and hidden affection for the minister, he should avoid closed relationship if such people will not have their way the minister should allow the presence of other responsible people or stay in an open place where interruption is allowed by the responsible person. In the same manner, they should be wise when ministering to children, recognizing their special vulnerabilities if they will not be tempted.

¹⁵ John Mark Falkenhain, Power and Relationships in Ministry Saint Luke Note, 2025

Visitation: Visitation is an important aspect of pastoral ministry, but it must be done with wisdom, especially with single mothers and widows. Some are welcoming, and some who are desperate. Another danger of visitation is the setting of traps of any kind for the pastor to avenge what he has done in the past. There was a case of a woman that wanted to kill a pastor that visited her, by pretending to be sick and requested that the pastor should please lay his hand on her, but has set an invisible trap on her head it took the grace of God to open the pastor's eyes to see the problem, it would have been the last prayer for the pastor in live¹⁶.

Challenges of minister's Relationships

His relationship with difficult church members

There are some difficult people in both the church and the environment that ministers must relate to; managing these relationships demands wisdom, which requires a combination of pastoral care, firm boundary-setting, and emotional maturity. Key strategies for ministers include maintaining objectivity, practicing empathetic listening, and, when necessary, implementing structured, protective measures to support the ministry's health. The minister should be sensitive to the following;

Identify Underlying Issues: Some are difficult to relate to, such as people who are hurting individuals. Instead of focusing solely on the behavior, the minister should identify the underlying need or pain and show him that he is cared for.

Set Firm Boundaries: The minister should set limits on communication with difficult people who will turn the relationship into something else for him. He should define his communication with different sets of people; he should be disciplined and must know the kind of people he will ask for

¹⁶ John, 2025.

financial assistance, so the relationship does not land the pastor in trouble.

Encourage Responsibility: Rather than doing all the work, empower difficult members to contribute to their own solutions. Give them tasks or assignments to complete before follow-up meetings.

Avoid Emotional Contagion: Anger is a reflex; nobody plans to be angry; negativity is contagious. Maintain objectivity and avoid becoming emotionally involved or mirroring the hostile attitude. Those the minister is laboring so hard on will likely misbehave and provoke him. He should be wise; he must not reciprocate anger but be able to control his emotions so the relationship is not affected. That is why he is there, as a minister.¹⁷

Utilize Biblical Confrontation: Ministers should always follow Jesus' model when dealing with issues with parishioners; use biblical references that will address the situation. When behaviors are disruptive, follow the Matthew 18:15–17 model: speak in private first, then involve others if necessary. This protects the community's health.

Pray for Them: Regular prayer is essential to maintain a Christ-like attitude toward challenging individuals. Prayer is very important in every situation; instead of cursing them, pray for God to handle the issue, and you will find that they eventually become the best of friends.

The Minister should be expecting the following his relationships

The Critical Member: These individuals often display anger or gossip. They need to be addressed directly, yet with compassion, or through church leadership/boards.

¹⁷ Jeremy Bell, *The Emotional Rollercoaster of Pastoral, Preaching and Pastoral leadership publications*, 2024

The Lonely/Needy: These individuals may be demanding due to isolation. They often require a patient, listening ear that helps them feel valued.

Maintain Self-Care: The stress of ministry can lead to burnout. Taking care of one's own mental, emotional, and physical health is crucial for long-term effectiveness.

Prioritize Family: Do not let ministry demands replace family responsibilities.

Seek Support: Utilize peer supervision and trusted colleagues to share the burden of difficult, complex, or potentially abusive situations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the essence of life is relationship; no one can live in isolation and achieve the purpose of life. Also, a minister is called to develop healthy relationships with everyone around him, starting with his immediate family, then with church members, and extending to the community at large. Remove the relationship from the ministry assignment and discover what will be left: self. And self in the life of a minister will make everybody around him stay clear of him, which will lead him to make unexpected mistakes that will cost him the ministry. Therefore, no relationship, no ministry.

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