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# GROWTH POINTS

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With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

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## The Case of the Expectant Deacon

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“When are you going to mow the lawn, pastor?” The question astonished pastor Miller. He had only served Crossroads Church for three weeks. The lawn around the church was fairly long, but he never imagined he was responsible to mow it. In his previous church, that had been the job of the trustees. His conversation with deacon Fenton was a jolt.

“Is that what you hired me to do?” Pastor Miller’s response sent a reverse shock wave back to deacon Fenton. “Well . . . ahh . . . I’ve never thought about it,” deacon Fenton acknowledged. “The previous pastors always mowed the lawn, and I just assumed you’d do it, too.”

I doubt if most people in a congregation, or church leaders for that matter, have even considered pastor Miller’s question: “Is that what you hired me to do?” Pastors and church leaders need to step back and ask, “What is the pastor’s primary responsibility?” Beyond the responsibility to pray (1 Timothy 2:1ff) and preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2), what are pastors to do?

Being a shepherd is closely aligned with being a friend. It’s within friendships that the best advice, rebuke, comfort, and correction are made and accepted. A therapist may be in a person’s life temporarily, but a pastor is in his/her life for the long haul. Pastors customarily build on strong, existing relationships. When you’ve buried a person’s mother, baptized their children, and officiated at their nephew’s wedding, you have been in their life consistently. That gives you an open door for caregiving that few others enjoy.

Most pastors are not psychologists. Unless you’re a trained therapist, you probably don’t know much about ADHD, PTSD, OCD, schizophrenia, or repressed memories. You must remember, though, that the prefix *psych* means *soul*. Psychology is *study of the soul*, and who can do that better than pastors?

Pastors find they are most likely to be asked to work through five crucial issues: grief, divorce, suicide, addictions, and

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marriage problems. To do so, pastors and churches use one or more of the following approaches.

**Pulpit Care:** Pastoral care is provided through the Sunday sermons, pastoral prayer, and after service prayer. Some pastors have a unique ability to love people from the pulpit, while providing helpful counsel for life's struggles and challenges. It's certain that the Bible covers a plethora of issues, which can be helpful. The opportunity to visit privately with a prayer counselor following a worship service offers a personal touch that meets many needs.

**Lay Ministry Care:** Volunteers who have special interests and gifting in caring for others are organized into small teams who visit, pray for, and care for others. Expanding a church's care ministry through multiple teams widens effective caregiving beyond what a single pastor can do on his own.

**Assistant Pastor Care:** A staff position is created to center on caring for others in the congregation. In some cases, a retired pastor is hired to fill this position part time. In larger congregations, a specialist in counseling or general pastoral care is brought onto the staff to target the needs of people.

**Small Group Care:** Larger churches discover that expecting all pastoral care to come from staff pastors is unworkable. The answer is to encourage the expansive growth of a small group ministry with caregiving at its heart. No matter what the groups are called—home groups, care groups, grace groups, mini-churches, care cells—their main job is to provide TLC: Tender Loving Care.

**Referral Care:** Staff pastors, or a designated lay person, offer triage meetings in order to determine the nature of needs. They then provide resources and means to direct people to professional and community organizations for help.

The nerve center for pastoral care is equipping the saints for ministry (Ephesians 4:12). This starts with moving cared-for Christians into caring Christians. Those who have experienced love and care from others, often are the prime people to enlist in care ministry. At least four pivotal areas of ministry training are needed.

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**Assistance for the Needy —**  
**Benevolence & Crisis Relief**  
**Recovery for the Addicted — Addiction Ministry & Care Groups**  
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**Convalescent & Home based Ministry**

Why not start developing your care ministry this month?

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