

A Married Couple Co Pastoring at Paraparaumu Baptist Church 2017

A Guide for Pastoral Call Committees

Tracey and Ben Wakefield

First off it is good to acknowledge that each co pastoring arrangement and co pastors experience will vary from this example case of Ben and Tracey who are a married couple. Here we hope to answer from their perspective how co pastoring works. We encourage call committees to consider co pastor applicants as candidates for your pastoral positions because of the richness and diversity that it brings.

They have been married for ten years and have been co pastoring for the past two years. When looking for a call they submitted their respective curriculum vitae with a cover letter explaining their desire to co pastor. In one case the cover letter and Tracey's CV was rejected and Ben was called for an interview - spouse not invited. Please don't do that. This was a demoralizing experience for Tracey personally. At two other interviews it was assumed that Ben would be the Senior leader and Tracey would be the Children and Families Pastor. Don't do that either. All other call committees interviewed us together and talked through co-pastoring. Questions regarding the practicality of the co pastor set up arose at these meetings and were variations of the following:

- Who will lead the elders?
- Who will be responsible for what?
- How will hours and pay be allocated?
- What about maternity leave?

Elders

The way they have worked out these practicalities are as follows. They have a chairperson who leads the elders meetings who is not Tracey or Ben. Together they will bring things to the elders regarding vision and direction for the church hence they lead the elders together but together they find a way forward. In our context having a capable 'other' chair the elders meetings and church meetings works for us. Another way would be to alternate the chair each co pastor takes it in turns to chair the meetings. The reason being for them is that it is important not to put all the burden of leadership on one person. We co pastor because we want to share and we want to promote egalitarian practice in the church.

Responsibilities

Ben and Tracey went down the lines of their interests and gifting's. They are the only staff. Ben looks after music, Tracey coordinates the youth ministry, Ben oversees children ministry and Tracey liaises with the pastoral care team. They work together on matters of church growth and mission and divide up tasks as they arise. Beware of gendered tasks. Is the male given the finance, technology, decision making and preaching and the female the admin, children and pastoral care because of underlying gender bias? It is very important for the elders and co pastors to look long and hard at all the portfolios or pastoral tasks and challenge some gender assumptions. It's a bit like at home the old fashioned assumption that the man mows the lawn and the woman cooks. I think we are a way past this stereotypical allocation of tasks; let's not slip into in in the church.

Hours and Pay

Paraparaumu Baptist has one full time pastoral role. They share that. When they started they had three preschool children, their youngest was just a very young baby and Tracey was

studying master's papers at Carey so they divided the hours one day for Tracey and four for Ben. They are free to reduce Ben's hours and increase Tracey's if they choose. They wonder if their hours had been fifty/fifty at the beginning or reviewed at a predetermined date would be better than starting the way they did but it very much suited their needs at the time. Other churches offering two full time positions or one and a half time will be in a stronger position to divide the hours equally. They are paid according to the hours they work. As we live in the same house only one housing allowance is allocated. We share the other allowances e.g. MEA, as required.

Parental leave

If your church is hesitant to employ people who would potentially be taking parental leave it is illegal to hire based on whether someone might become a parent. Information on eligibility for parental leave is available on Employment New Zealand's website. There are even options for dividing the leave between the parents. There is a lot of potential for co-pastors who are also co-parent to work out parental leave in a way that works for them.

A few last comments on co pastoring

Harassment and Gender Stereotyping

People will comment on Tracey's clothing or hair which can be embarrassing and lead into gender stereotyping. Ben also gest comments about the man being the leader but mostly this is from other church leaders. Within the church it is Ben's goal to continually comment and say that he is one of the pastors and Tracey is the other. This publically breaks down the idea that he is the senior leader.

A process to address sexual harassment would be advisable along with a plan for how to address benign sexism. In the wider Baptist context it is no secret there are Baptist pastors who adhere to complementarian theology and practice and do not think Tracey should be at the table. Eldership teams should be aware of these subtle pressures on a female co pastor.

Mission

Co pastoring is good for the mission of the church. It shows those who may perceive the church as sexist, patriarchal, old fashioned and hierarchical that there is another way. Co- pastoring is a glorious kick in the teeth to stereotypical expectations of leadership in the church to the Glory of God.

Bless you all as you begin the search.

Ben and Tracey Wakefield