

THE VISITING PREACHER

Within the Baptist Union lies a wealth of experience, vested in Preaching Secretaries and visiting preachers, on how best to make the whole experience of having a visit from a non-church member in the pulpit an experience that runs smoothly and is a joy for all concerned, to the glory of our Saviour.

However, the practice varies considerably from Area to Area and from church to church, and many are the Church Secretaries and Preachers who can recount awkward, embarrassing and even hilarious moments when either the pulpit remains empty, is double-booked, or there is some breakdown in communication.

These guidelines may help to avoid some of these. Some may seem obvious – but you'd be surprised!

The Preaching Secretary

Booking preachers

1. Keep a diary. The Baptist Times year planner can be a useful tool.
2. Make sure you have the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all those who have been appreciated in the pulpit, as well as the Association handbook, which gives recommended preachers and retired ministers/pastors who are willing to preach. If in an area covered by a Baptist College, the name of the Secretary or other official who deals with student engagements and their telephone number should also be kept.
3. Make contact early. Remember that the best ones will be picked first. This is especially the case for special services. A prominent name may well be booked up several years in advance.
4. Have handy the information the preacher is likely to want to know: -
 - What type of service is it – a special occasion?
 - Does it include communion? If so, how formal is it and what invitations are given? Where is placed in the service, and if it is as a separate service following the main one, is it necessary to greet at the door folk who may be leaving?
 - Is there a Worship leader, and if so how much of the service will be led by him/her? Is there a musician? How and when can they be contacted for choice of hymns/songs or theme?
 - Is the preacher required to choose hymns/songs, and if so is there a hymnbook or if power point/OHP and how wide is the selection?
 - If a power point presentation is acceptable for display as the sermon is delivered, to whom should this be sent, and by what time.
 - Is there a preaching plan, and how strictly is this to be adhered to?
 - What is the likely composition of the congregation?
 - If there are children present, is a children's talk required and when and how are arrangements made for them?
 - What version of the Bible is used? Will there be readers from the congregation, and if not, is it the custom to announce page numbers?
 - Is there a set order of service, and how strictly is this to be adhered to?
 - Is there a time constraint?
 - Is there parking in or near the church premises?
 - Will hospitality be offered?

5. Send a letter immediately confirming what has been said, and if necessary include a map of the area with the church marked, directions from where the preacher is coming from and details re parking. Say "Thank you."

One week before

6. A week before the engagement telephone to confirm.
7. Make sure the treasurer will have the appropriate fee available. The fee should comprise both a preaching fee and travel re-imbusement, generally at the lower of the Inland Revenue rates. Be prepared to be generous, but in any case a visiting preacher should never be out of pocket. The preacher may want to refuse payment, but he/she should at least have the freedom to do so.

On the day

8. Be at church early to greet the preacher.
9. Make sure there is someone available to help carry any equipment.
10. Do not desert the visitor and any guest they may bring, but be prepared to show them round. If otherwise busy yourself, make sure there is someone to accompany them.
11. Make sure they know where the toilet is!
12. Be prepared to offer a cup of tea or coffee.
13. Check that the preacher's water is fresh.
14. Ensure there is a quiet place for counselling after the service. A deeply troubled person who has been moved by the preacher is not going to want to shout in the preacher's ear.

The Preacher

Invitations and preparations

1. Keep a diary, and make sure you enter all engagements, including your own family, holidays and other commitments. Remember that an engagement is a sacred appointment. The practice of accepting a "better" engagement later is unacceptable.
2. It is always a privilege to be asked to preach.
3. As soon as contacted, confirm whether free or not, and enter in the diary immediately.
4. Make sure you find out what is required. Some or all of the questions in 4. above may be necessary. Say "Thank you."
5. Prepare in good time. A rushed or careless preparation helps no one, least of all yourself. Remember whom you are serving! Surely nothing but the best is good enough. Even if you preach from full notes, make sure you are familiar with them.
6. Telephone a week in advance to confirm the engagement, and to advise readings, hymns/songs as necessary.

On the day

7. When you leave home, make sure you have your sermon with you! Always take a Bible, even if you intend to use a church Bible. We are surely Bible people, and not to carry one conveys a wrong message.
8. Before the service
 - Leave enough time to travel, allowing for emergencies. Take the church telephone number and directions with you.
 - Arrive in good time to find out where everything is and where everybody will be.
 - Check that you know how the microphones work and any other equipment that you will be operating are functioning correctly.
 - Check that the correct hymn numbers have been put up if these are displayed.
 - It is a good idea to lay out all your material ready to hand before the service, but if the announcements are being made or the worship led by someone else from the pulpit/ preaching station, take precautions to ensue that your materials are not going to be used or run off with by someone else.
 - If you are asked to preside at communion, get someone to run through exactly what will be expected. What is the “usual way” in one church will be unique.
 - Don't be so absorbed by your preparations that you appear unapproachable. Some may want to speak to you, and what they say may affect what you have prepared.
9. During the service – Be prepared.
 - do not start fiddling with papers or searching in handbag or case. Folk have come to worship God, not to watch you show how unprepared you are. Try to avoid anything that may distract the congregation, like pages being flicked over.
 - Looking up hymn numbers etc. during the singing of the previous hymn sends a message that you are not worshipping with the congregation. It is better to have your places marked.
 - Be listening to God all the time, and be prepared to be surprised by the Spirit!
10. At the end of the service, go to the church door or wherever folk are. Most folk appreciate a handshake and greeting from the preacher. Be prepared to minister if necessary. Try not to rush off unless this is unavoidable.
11. It's a good idea to check that you have collected all you personal books and items before you leave.
12. When driving home, watch your speed! An uplift of the Spirit will affect you physically.