

# Etiquette for Guests Ministers:

## How To Honor The Pastor in His Church

by Tony Cooke

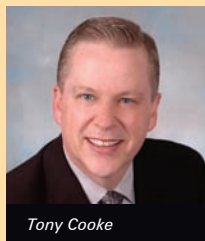
For several years, I served as the director of a large ministerial association. From that time right up to this current season of ministry, pastors will periodically call me to discuss problems that have arisen in their church as a result of the improper conduct of a guest minister in the pulpit. The problems are usually not nearly as extreme as the “composite” story below; most often they are merely misunderstandings or minor, unintentional oversights rather than flagrant, ethical violations. However, this hypothetical conversation reflects the kinds of dilemmas pastors sometimes face after inviting a guest minister to fill their pulpit.

I had a guest minister speak in my church, and he projected an attitude that seemed to imply God had finally shown up in our church now that he had arrived. There was no acknowledgement or recognition of how God had worked in our church in years past, nor was there any acknowledgment or affirmation of my role as the pastor. In front of the congregation, he asked me if it

was all right if he obeyed God. What was I supposed to say?

The minister proceeded to tell the people that if they needed a miracle, they were to give his ministry an offering of \$61.03 (based on Isaiah 61:3) during that service. If they needed two miracles, they should double that amount — or triple it if they needed three miracles. I probably should have corrected what the minister was telling the people right then, but I decided to wait and do it the next week after he had left.

I later found out that the minister had identified some of the wealthier members of the congregation and was singling them out for personal ministry. I also learned that he had sympathized with some of our disgruntled members, telling them that he’d been sent by God to our church so they could be fed and refreshed by his anointing (implying, I think, that I don’t have any). This minister was very charismatic, and



Tony Cooke

The first time I met **Tony Cooke** was just after Rev. Kenneth E. Hagin had used a raw manuscript of my book *Dressed To Kill* as part of his seminar material for his Winter Bible Seminar in 1991. Tony is the one who delivered this material to him, so I asked to meet Tony for lunch so I could personally thank him for passing my manuscript to Brother Hagin. From that day until now, Tony Cooke has been a treasured personal friend, and I respect him greatly as a Christian leader. Tony is respected by Christian leaders across America and around the world for his balanced approach to ministry and doctrine. I’m proud he is my friend; I am thankful he is a member of the Board of Directors for Rick Renner Ministries; and I am grateful for the insights Tony shares in this article, which I believe will be of great assistance to you.

— Rick Renner

people were drawn to his boldness. But I felt undermined as the pastor, and I felt like my people were being exploited. I won't be inviting him back, although some of my people really like him and have pressured me to do so. They've now informed me that he's coming back into town to hold a meeting at another location. They've been invited, but I've received no communication from him. In the final analysis, it seems he had no intention of helping to build our church; he was just using our church to draw people to himself and to build his own ministry.

When communicating with pastors about some of the conflicts that arise concerning guests ministers, I am often reminded of Rev. Kenneth E. Hagin's attitude. He often spoke of the many times he'd weep as he drove away from a church after his time of ministry there, praying that none of his words or actions would cause strife in the congregation or make the pastor's job more difficult. This sincere, humble attitude should be the heart of every guest minister.

### ■ Conducting Your Ministry With Tact and Integrity

As illustrated in the following scriptures, the apostle Paul was very aware that his conduct, sincerity, and attitude toward the churches he visited was of the utmost importance:

We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God...

2 Corinthians 6:3,4 *NKJV*

For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness — God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.... You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe....

1 Thessalonians 2:5-8,10 *NKJV*

In regard to his ministry in local churches, Paul always espoused certain core values that are still relevant and applicable to traveling ministers today:

- He didn't want to cause anyone to be offended or to stumble.
- He avoided flattery and covetousness.
- He was not demanding (or burdensome, as the *King James Version* says).
- He truly loved the people to whom he ministered.
- He carried himself with true integrity.

### ■ Operating With Mutual Respect

If a good working relationship is to be established between a pastor and a guest minister, there must be mutual respect. Since this article is geared toward the guest minister, let's identify some important principles for guest ministers to follow that will help them show proper respect to the pastors who invite them to their churches and ensure that each visit is both pleasant and beneficial for all involved.

#### 1. A guest minister is exactly that — a guest.

While ministering as a guest, you should submit to the pastor of that local church and show respect accordingly. It's always good to honor and speak well of the pastor to the congregation. He was there before you arrived, and he'll be there after you are gone. Publicly showing the pastor sincere respect can make his job a little easier — and making the pastor's job easier should be one of your desired goals as a guest minister.

Incidentally, respect isn't something that should only be shown to the senior pastor. Some people (not just ministers) will treat the pastor respectfully but be rude to secretaries, other staff members, ushers, etc. This should never describe you. Build a reputation for showing respect and honor to everyone you come in contact with.

#### 2. Seek the welfare of the pastor and the local church as you minister.

One pastor said, "The traveling ministers I invite to our church are those who will strengthen what we're endeavoring to do here — ministers who will help us fulfill our purpose and vision."

Pastors appreciate guest ministers who respect and value their churches and truly seek to impart blessing. Likewise, many pastors have expressed concern regarding some ministers who seem to want only to book a meeting and receive an offering, showing little regard for the pastor or the congregation.

**3. Recognize and cooperate with the culture of that local church.** Perhaps the congregation has a different style or does some things differently than you prefer. But just as it is unwise to visit someone else's home and try to rearrange his furniture or speak disparagingly of his house, you shouldn't try to straighten out someone else's church. Instead, seek to be a blessing and to encourage the congregation in their spiritual walk.

**4. Be a friend to the pastor.** One pastor related, "Some visiting ministers like to barricade themselves in their room and would rather not be disturbed. But for someone like me who lives in a small town and is far removed from fellowship with like-minded believers, it's nice to have some fellowship time with our guest speakers. I don't need much time — usually a conversation around a meal is sufficient."

So make it your goal to be sensitive in this area, and make yourself available to spend some quality time fellowshiping with the pastor during your visit. More than likely, the experience will benefit both of you, and it might even blossom into the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

**5. Respect the guidelines that you receive for the meeting.** For example, cooperate with the pastor's guidelines for how long you should preach. There may be some special meetings where time is not really an issue, but, in general, time is important (especially when there are multiple services on Sunday morning). Learn to work within the timeframes given — and remember: *"He who is brief shall be heard again."*

One pastor related, "Be sensitive to the length of the service. In our church, we expect a guest minister to go a bit longer, and we welcome that. But some have taken as long as 40 minutes to advertise their CDs and books — and by the time they finally got to the message, the people were already worn out!"

**6. Consider asking the pastor if there are any topics he'd like you to emphasize or even to stay away from.** One pastor told me, "It speaks volumes when a guest minister will sincerely ask if there is anything specific that my church needs." Pastors appreciate it when you have a servant's heart and desire to work as a co-laborer in their ministry.

**7. Watch out for land mines.** If a topic is potentially controversial, privately talk to the pastor and ask permission to speak on the subject before you share it with the congregation. This kind of foresight shows respect and will be greatly appreciated. Many pastors have had to clean up messes after a guest minister spoke inappropriately about political issues or made dogmatic statements about controversial issues. Pastors want the guest minister to bring blessing and edification, not problems that they will have to deal with afterwards.

Regarding this point, one pastor said, "I have to live with the crazy things some guest ministers say. It's wonderful (as a guest minister) to walk into a church and declare, 'Everyone is going to be healed tonight!' — but I'd like the minister's cell-phone number so he or she can talk to those who *don't* get healed!"

Another pastor said, "I appreciate it when guest ministers are not dogmatic with their points but teach with a humble attitude in case they teach something differently than I would as a pastor."

**8. Up-front and clear communication is important.** Ensure that all arrangements pertaining to your visit have been mutually agreed upon by yourself and the church. For instance, it would cause strain if, at the last minute, you expected a church to provide transportation and lodging for you *and* your entourage of ten, when they were prepared only to cover these expenses for you and your spouse. Presumption and assumption almost always create problems.

**9. Don't be demanding or burdensome.** If you're perceived as demanding, it can certainly strain your relationship with the pastor. A pastor remarked, "I've had guest ministers tell me what hotel they had to stay in, what kind of suite they had to have, and the specific brand of bottled water they required to be in the room. I've even had ministers tell me they

wanted me to give them an open credit card so they could eat when and wherever they wanted! Needless to say, some ministers have not ministered and never will minister (outside of an open vision from Jesus!) in my church.”

**10. Be yourself.** Pastors appreciate guest ministers who are genuine and who don't try to be someone or something they're not. Although you may feel pressure to perform, to impress, or to make things happen, it is absolutely essential that you remain true to yourself as you minister. It is one thing to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, but trying to force a move of the Spirit is another thing entirely. Problems have been created when guest ministers have pushed people to make them “fall under the power” in healing lines or conjured up “words from the Lord.” Your ministry needs to be

based on the Word and the true leading of the Spirit — not on fleshly attempts to force something to happen.

One pastor commented that several visitors to his church were confused, alienated, and embarrassed when a guest minister singled them out and tried to force a certain type of “ministry” on them that they didn't understand. Of course, it grieved the pastor when those guests never returned, for a pastor's heart is to see people gathered, not scattered.

I once heard a guest minister call out a gentleman in the congregation and say the Lord had revealed to him that the man was afflicted with a certain disease.

Continued on page 36

## No Lone Rangers in the Kingdom

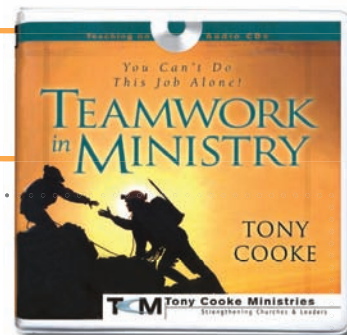
**T**he ministry is no place for lone rangers. At times, you may feel as though going solo is the best way. But in the total scheme of things, when it comes to making a lasting impact for the Kingdom of God, you're going to need to know how to work well with others.

In his 3-CD series entitled “**Teamwork in Ministry**,” **Tony Cooke** does what he does best: He tells you the truth from a solid scriptural foundation — and he does it with the kind of candor that comes from having seen enough hits and misses in ministry to know full well the many variables that may be influencing your situation.

For nearly 30 years, Tony has traveled across the country and around the world, helping believers reach their potential in Christ, helping leaders maximize their skills and effectiveness, and helping churches become healthy, vibrant, and strong. A dominant feature he has noted among all three categories is *the need for teamwork*.

Tony explains the power of teamwork as it is evidenced through excellence in ministry, people skills, servanthood, attitude, relationships, and hospitality. He stresses that a person's personal contribution to the Body of Christ will increase dramatically when he learns how to effectively work with others in serving the purpose of God.

Paul Harvey once said, “The spirit of interdependence will not cost us more than it's worth. On the steep slope ahead, holding hands is necessary. And it just might be that we can learn to enjoy it.” If we want to be effective in ministering to people's needs in this hour, it's vital that we learn how to hold fast to the Master and to the hands of our brothers and sisters. There may be a steep slope ahead of us in the coming days — but if we'll take our place next to our God-appointed teammates, we'll all reach the peak after enjoying the climb!



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## Etiquette for Guests Ministers (continued from page 11)

This gentleman was embarrassed and promptly said he did not have that disease. He humbly told the minister he'd just undergone a complete physical and had been found to be in perfect health. But instead of acknowledging his fallibility, the minister continued to push the issue, and eventually he intimidated the man to come forward for prayer anyway. The man reluctantly complied, but the entire episode created confusion and an uneasy atmosphere in the meeting.

### ■ With Respect and Cooperation Come Blessing!

One pastor expressed the following: “I want to see our guest ministers blessed. I’ve noticed that those who care about the people and reflect that in their ministry are always blessed abundantly. But I do *not* want those who come to minister in our church to use our invitation as an opportunity to further their own agenda. Certainly, there are occasions when I know of a noteworthy work the guest minister has done, and I will request him or her to share it with our congregation. We need balance in these matters — both on the pastor’s side and on the visiting minister’s side. But the bottom line is this: I’m looking for a guest minister who really has a heart for the church.”

Great blessing occurs when the various ministry gifts (Ephesians 4:11-13) work together respectfully and harmoniously. Mutual honor, understanding, and sensitivity to each other’s needs are vital keys to building healthy relationships between pastors and guest ministers. When these relationships thrive, problems are curtailed, the saints get blessed, and the Lord is glorified. **1**

#### PROFILE

■ From 1985 to 2002, **Tony Cooke** was an associate pastor to Kenneth Hagin Jr. of Rhema Bible Church and served in various roles for Rhema Bible Training Center in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Today Tony is the President of Tony Cooke Ministries and travels around the world, equipping church leaders and ministers to be effective at what God has called them to do. He is also the author of two outstanding books called *Life After Death* and *In Search of Timothy*.

Beware of the barrenness of  
an over-crowded life.

—Anonymous