

Most Valuable Partnership (Part 2)

By Stephanie Wolfe

Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." Col. 4:17

In 1998, 10 years after pioneering our church in Duluth, Georgia, I realized that I had learned a great many things the (proverbial) hard way. I am living proof of the saying, "some of us learn from the mistakes of others, and some of us are the OTHERS". I have had the privilege of being the "others" more than once. However, the "hard way" is not so bad, because what you learn that way seems to stick. Our role in ministry is to preach the truth so that our flock can walk in the truth and avoid some of the pitfalls that result in "hard way" education. That is when I decided to begin Mates in Ministry – a gathering of pastors' wives who would meet regularly and in between meetings I write a newsletter that is to encourage, strengthen and support helpmates to a pastor/husband.

Over the years, I have been privileged to speak to many wonderful audiences, but no audience is more valuable to me than that of pastor/leaders and their spouses. When I speak to pastor's wives, I often make this request: *If you are currently married to a full time pastor, please stand up.* I then make second request: *If that man was a full-time pastor when you married him, please remain standing.* My point is clear as the majority of the group takes their seats and I continue the thought with: *So like me, you married a man that didn't look like, talk like, act like, or even remotely resemble a Pastor.* To which they laugh and nod in absolute agreement. So, in other words . . . **WE HAD NO IDEA WHAT WE WERE GETTING INTO!**

Our dreams of a white picket fence and two car garage were met with a parsonage and a church van! Our dreams of weekends at the beach and a vacation in Hawaii were met with church meeting marathons and a week at youth camp!

Gone are the days of my husband's bricklaying stories and drive-by building inspections where he would show me his latest completed project. Now the projects are never actually finished, and there often aren't a lot of visible signs of his workmanship. Gone are the days of company parties, yearly bonuses, and benefit packages. These were replaced with going to a church member's house for dinner, and you can bring your kids.

This is not what we expected . . . though we didn't know what to expect. Still aren't sure, but pretty sure this wasn't it. ☺ Ministry is no easy task. A ministry home is no easy environment. A ministry marriage is no easy partnership. BUT it is wonderful. There are other "easy" jobs, but their only benefit may be that they are easy. I love ministry because it is NOT easy. It's a challenge therefore I must constantly attend to it.

This is the only job my husband has ever had that I share with him (though I know he does not always find this to be a positive thing). I didn't share his bricklaying job. I didn't share his welding job. I didn't share his carpentry job! No matter what specific part I play, we DO ministry together! People see us as a package. My role on the front pew is an important one. I offer strength and stability to the "message" my husband preaches. Just by my "being there" he is stronger, bolder, and more confident, because he knows I'm praying for him, believing in him, and standing in his corner. I am a co-laborer – and a partner.

My husband is a pretty ordinary guy; probably much like your husband. He has two legs, two arms, and one head. (Thank God, because anything with two

heads is a monster!) He breathes ordinary air, drives an ordinary car, and lives in an ordinary house. He has one extraordinary wife, but other than that he's pretty average. (Ha!) His hair gets messy, his clothes get dirty, he showers, wears underpants, and even uses the toilet! Sorry to be so blunt, but I often get the feeling some people don't see this about my husband?

He gets tired, sad, and mad. He gets underestimated, undermined, and even under the weather. He gets overwhelmed, overcome, and overdrawn. He gets misunderstood, misinterpreted, misquoted, and misrepresented. He has feelings, and emotions. If you tickle him, he laughs. If you hurt him, he cries. I sometimes want to scream at people and say, "Yes, folks. He's human! I know. I live with him! He is a man." And what's wrong with that? The only difference between him and other men is a calling. He is called of God into full-time ministry.

I sometimes feel that people are shocked to discover that my husband has limitations! They are stunned to find out that he has the same number of hours in his day that they do in theirs, or that he couldn't somehow fit more into his day than they do. He is in fact, the "Man of God".

We know and accept our husband's limitations. We're glad he's human. We even get to remind him of that every now and then, but we love him just like he is. Human and all! We are his helpmates, but even more than that, we are *Mates in Ministry!* We serve him as he serves the church. This is a very important role. I often feel we need more education to do our job, than they need to do theirs!

I love my job as the Head Minister to the Minister. I'm responsible for that smile on his face when he walks confidently to the pulpit. I'm responsible for that spring in his step when he heads into the church office. I'm most likely responsible for that dapper suit and tie he is proudly wearing. I'm responsible for that good attitude that helps him to face disgruntled members or difficult counseling situations. I have a big responsibility and I take it seriously, because you see, my husband/minister isn't complete without me. He needs me. He needs my hugs, and kisses, and pats on the back, and cheers, and smiles, and "amen-s". Well, call me arrogant, but quite frankly, I feel like I'm important to the whole project. You see, I go with him everywhere he goes, even when I don't leave the house.

I can send him out the door with a joyful, happy, loved feeling, where he can tackle the tests and wrestle the enemy to the ground! Or, I can send him out the door with a heavy heart, full of hurt or anger, where he will quickly be overtaken by grief and anxiety, unable to jump even the smallest hurdle.

I am not the Sr. Pastor (thank God, or we wouldn't have a church to worry about!) and though my input is valuable to my husband, ultimately, I am not responsible for the way money is spent, ministry is done, or employees are hired. My job is actually bigger than all of that. When I do my job, he can do his. It's easy to tell if I'm doing a good job of ministering to the minister. He gets much more done, and enjoys doing it!

As you can see, a minister's wife has a tremendous ministry in her home, marriage, and ministry within the church. She is not to be overlooked when her husband is praised for his success as a pastor, leader and preacher. Though her praise may be behind the scenes, and her treasure laid up in heaven, she will see the fruit of her labor in the lives that her husband is able to touch. Without her investment in him, he is somewhat limited and will find ministry more difficult and less rewarding.

Mates, let's not neglect our most important role as a partner - that of minister to the minister.

As a Most Valuable Partner:

1. We must realize and appreciate the vital role we play in the ministry to our local church or mission field through our ministry to the minister. If need be, we must welcome the Holy Spirit's gently correction and allow Him to remind us of this vital responsibility – given only to us – as his wife.
2. We must recognize that our role is to come along side of our husband – not to lag behind so as to hinder his forward momentum, but not out in front pulling him along. We are to assist him to “help meet” the objective.

You may want to:

- Find one thing that you do that brings joy to your husband's life, therefore increasing his effectiveness in ministry, and DO IT!
 - Find one things that you do that brings your husband down, therefore decreasing his effectiveness in ministry, and STOP IT!
3. We must see our husbands through the eyes of the Lord, focusing not on his *faults* but on his *needs*. Our responsibility is to lift him up and ask the Lord to use him mightily to accomplish the mission he is called to.
 4. We must ask the Lord to create in us a desire to meet the needs that *only we* can meet, and to pray for the needs that we see that *only He* can meet. Run the race set before “us” and not try to run a race that is not ours to run.
 5. We must ask for forgiveness where we have failed to see our role in a positive light and strive to discover new ways to find fulfillment through our ministry to the minister - our husband, our friend, and our partner.
 6. We must “take heed to the ministry which you have been called and fulfill it”.

That's my name beside his on the sign. That's my face beside his on the brochure, and that's my signature beside his on the dotted line, and if we are experiencing a Most Valuable Partnership, that's me standing by his side – physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Stephanie Wolfe is the author of *Mentoring Women* a 12-month resource for churches to develop women in the area of spiritual maturity and character development. She is the author of *Ahhh, the Ministry!* – For pastors' wives, from a pastor's wife who understands pastors' wives. For more information concerning her numerous women's resources or to contact her to speak for your next conference visit her website www.innerbeauties.com or call 678.714.7008.