

Bishop Connie Mitchell Shelton:

Connie Shelton here, the Bishop of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Dr. Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell:

And I'm Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell. I direct the Duke Clergy Health Initiative.

Bishop Shelton:

We are here at Duke University for Convocation and Pastor School, and we are celebrating together Pastor Appreciation Month.

It's October, and I know, clergy, that you are working hard and serving Jesus and your people. We wanted to take a moment and say thank you. Thank you for all the ways that you love others and care for others as a pastor in your community.

So, Rae Jean, I started thinking earlier — what are ways that people can extend appreciation to their pastor? And I was thinking about that old book, *The Five Love Languages*, that people do for pre-marriage counseling, and since you are a community psychologist as well as the Director of the Clergy Health Initiative, I was wondering, let's think of ways for words of affirmation, or gifts, or acts of service that people could express appreciation of their pastor.

Dr. Proeschold-Bell:

I've never thought of that book before in terms of clergy, but that is so fitting. The "words of affirmation" in particular make a lot of sense to me. And when you give words of affirmation to someone, it's important to be specific. It's one thing to say that "I appreciate you," and it's another to say, "I remember in that sermon on forgiveness, I was moved, and it made me want to try to be more forgiving."

Trying to be specific makes a big difference.

Bishop Shelton:

That's super helpful. And we've had lots of clergy here, pastors here, who we've been pulling aside and saying, "When have you felt most appreciated?" We just heard from a pastor who said people always walk out of the church and say, "Great sermon, Pastor."

But it's those people who send a message later in the week when they've thought about something specific that really means a lot.

So let's think of others. Maybe gifts or acts of service. Can you think of other ways?

Dr. Proeschold-Bell:

Oh, I think the gifts idea is wonderful, and it can be really small. I know my pastor likes pistachios. It can be figuring out someone's favorite coffee. It can be just a really small thing saying, "I was thinking of you."

It doesn't really matter what it was, but if it can be personal — like feeling seen as a person — a lot of the times clergy feel like they are only wearing the robe, and they are not seen as an individual.

Bishop Shelton:

Yeah. So, do you know your pastor's favorite cake? Restaurant? Think of ways that you can say, "I see you. I know you. And we appreciate you." And that's another way.

I can think of one, when I was a new mom and had our second child, and a woman in the church fixed meals for us for two to three — I won't exaggerate, we'll say for sure two months, every day because she said, "I don't ever want you to have to worry about what you're going to cook or if you're going to have time to do the other work. I'm going to take that off your plate."

I felt very seen, very loved, and very cared for.

Dr. Proeschold-Bell:

And that's a signal of you as a full person, that you have a full life, that you are both pastoring and have a family life or hobbies or interests outside.

And I think, too, just showing interest in your pastor, asking them, "What vacation do you have planned?" and saying, "Oh, I'm so glad that you are going to take vacation." That is modeling for us what we can do, too, and that God's got this world and God will keep us safe and connected even with a couple days off.

Bishop Shelton:

That's beautiful. Dr. Rae Jean, thank you, and thanks for all your work with the Clergy Health Initiative.

Laity, all of you parishioners in the church, take time this month, and every month, to show your pastor or pastors that you care about them and you appreciate them for who they are always. What were we saying earlier — to make sure that we are giving folks the benefit of the doubt and to extend grace to pastors?

Dr. Proeschold-Bell:

That's right. Assume good intent. And if there's anything, laity, that you are concerned about with your pastor, take it directly to them.

Bishop Shelton:

Yeah.

Dr. Proeschold-Bell:

Have an open conversation.

Bishop Shelton:

Those are healthy ways to be loved.

Clergy Appreciation Month

Bishop Connie Mitchell Shelton & Dr. Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell



North Carolina Conference
The United Methodist Church

So thank you, and we look forward to hearing all the great stories of how you have shown appreciation.