

## Seven Reasons Why Pastors Might Invite Me to Their Congregation

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1. I can say what you can't say without spending far too much time in damage control.
2. I know enough to create openings for you to distance yourself from my claims afterwards if that's necessary to protect the spiritual life of some particular person. *I'm nobody's pastor*, but I appreciate the fact that you are. I'm not in this to obstruct anyone's spiritual journey.
3. You can't meet all of the spiritual and intellectual needs of all of your people all of the time. There's a cohort whose needs I *can* meet, and without much cost to anybody else, because most of the "anybody elses" will shrug me off as irrelevant. Then I leave, and you get credit for bringing me in—or you're forgiven for a one-off adult ed dud.
4. If we are collectively the Mystical Body of the Risen Christ—or whatever you want to call it—then somewhere there's a place for everybody. Think of me, perhaps, as freshly grated horseradish. That's not something you'd want as a steady diet. But a bit of me in coleslaw dressing is perfect. Or with rare roast beef. Once in a while people need to be fed something a bit unlike their ordinary fare.
5. Theology is an extraordinarily complex and sophisticated intellectual enterprise. I do a reasonably entertaining job of undergraduate-level cultural history that will equip your people to recognize and appreciate more of the depth of what you have been teaching them all along. That's my goal in life. The clergy I'm friends with are terrific but desperately frustrated theologians because their people neither understand nor appreciate the subtlety of what they are hearing week after week. I can help with that in some small way.
6. You need a week off from writing sermons. And in the pulpit I draw unabashedly on my own deeply traditional religious sensibility. The adult ed hour is a different gig. I know the difference. I could never muster the sustained pastoral presence you muster day in and day out, but despite my edgy wit I am also a deeply maternal woman and an authentic grey-haired granny. Furthermore, *God loves us* is an utterly radical claim that can't be repeated often enough.
7. Poets, priests, and storytellers are kinfolk, and we always have been. Our cultural roles are slightly different, and those differences are important; but that neither changes nor challenges the bond of kinship. We all seek what Keats described as "truth carried alive into the heart by passion." Academics, including theologians, are by definition dispassionate. Their abstract dogma can get in the way of what we're trying to do. My many clergy friends are all worn down at times by committee structures, policies, and politics. And so once in a while any of us need a hand—and who better than kinfolk to lend a hand?