

NON-MEMBER SECRETARIES

Roy H. Lanier Jr.

Box 472406

Garland, TX 75047-2406

A question has been sent to the editor about a congregation using a non-Christian as a secretary. It is supposed that this secretary would be the main one in the church office and would handle all of the normal affairs. The lady in question is the wife of a member, attends all the services of the congregation, but has made it clear for over a dozen years that she does not intend to be baptized into Christ.

Such a study as this is in the realm of good judgment, opinion, and taste. The daily secretarial work could easily be done by a non-member, but it is all the “baggage that goes with it” that should give thoughtful Christians a pause to consider. Some considerations border on spiritual truths, perhaps even compromise; but generally such a decision would be left up to the wise counsel of godly overseers. These thoughts would not concern the use of temporary help for special jobs, nor the hiring of a firm to help with some publication.

Concerned Cautions

First, it might be observed that there are *vast differences between spiritual and secular* functions. For one to be concerned about who mows

the yard or does the janitorial work is far different from a concern about who ushers at the Lord's Supper, teaches a class, or serves as the church secretary. Some functions are simply secular, while others involve spiritual influences and responsibilities. A secretary is quite involved in spiritual matters.

Second, the congregation must always be concerned about *influence and example*. In matters of morals, Paul was greatly disturbed about Corinth's influence among the Gentile world (1 Corinthians 5:1). In matters of less importance, as surely the work of a secretary is, a church still must be cautious about influence and example. One easy way to observe this is to consider what a secretary might say to someone calling the office inquiring about becoming a Christian. If the secretary were not a Christian, the influence would be compromised. Such employment would leave a congregation open to a charge of letting their "good be evil spoken of:" (Romans 14:16 ASV). A church secretary is very high on the list of those who represent the congregation to the public.

Third, a non-Christian secretary *could offer but little encouragement for member calls* of a spiritual nature. Knowing that she is not a Christian would put a damper on persons needing spiritual boost. One avenue many members normally use to receive some advice and encouragement would not be open. Who would want to call her for spiritual advice? Such a non-member could hardly be "ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope

that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Many a problem has been assisted or solved by the calm, quiet, and faith-building encouragement of a good secretary.

Fourth, *confusion among members* would be present more of the time than not. For this query to be sent to the editor shows the possibility of confusion among the local members. In such matters of judgement the less confusion that can be caused is worth consideration.

Solicitude for the church

Counseling is often involved in the work of a secretary. Whether it be those who call on the telephone or persons visiting the office, a secretary is often called upon to give spiritual empathy and advice. On the most important of all relationships, a non-Christian could not be depended upon to speak boldly about obedience to Christ. Close behind that of overseers and preachers comes the impact of good secretaries.

Confidentiality in the matters of the congregation might be in question. Many secretaries are called upon to take notes for meetings of overseers. In cases where significant spiritual problems are discussed, the secretary should be someone with the same spiritual values. A non-Christian does not have that most valued of all values: being a brother or sister in Christ.

Concern for the brethren and for the lost would not be the same for a non-Christian. The very finest of personalities and characters still would not have the same outlook: “in honor preferring one another” (Romans 12:10). J. H. Thayer, in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New*

Testament (American Book Company, New York-Cincinnati-Chicago, 1889, p. 539) states this word “preferring” means “go before and show the way...go before as a leader....” A secretary would not have the same relation to those needy ones and could not “go before and show the way.” A good secretary can be most effective in calling the sick, the absentees, visitors to the services, and prospects for studies, but a non-member’s sway would be compromised.

Regard for truth

A non-Christian secretary in a church office is one who has not paid proper respect to the truth. The business of the church is above all else the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), and now one of the persons most in the forefront of the congregation would be one that has not respected and obeyed that truth.

A non-Christian secretary is one who has not paid proper respect to Jesus Christ as Lord. For one to show an intention of not being baptized into Christ is to flaunt the Lord’s simple wish that all be born anew (John 3:3-5). A church would have in their office a person with “dead faith” (James 2:14-26). The one person who stands most often in the eye of the public, other than the local preacher, is the secretary. Could a non-member “show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9)? Further, a person refusing to obey Christ in baptism would be flaunting the Lord’s example that he left, “that ye should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

A non-Christian secretary could not show spiritual love and devotion to members of the congregation, for “what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:15). In such a situation, would this qualify as an “unequal yoke,” since the influence of a secretary would be so prominent? There is something special about the bond of love between brethren who are in the kingdom, for citizens in Christ’s kingdom are to “follow after things that make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another” (Romans 14:19). If a disobedient child of the world can function well in edifying “one another,” then what is there that is special about being in Christ?

Conclusion

Remembering that such a decision is in the realm of judgement, one still needs to conclude the question in the safest spiritual way. Considering the influence within and without the congregation, it seems much more proper that the secretary should be able to function spiritually within the work as well as doing the normal secretarial duties.

A non-Christian secretary would be crippled in doing spiritual work that so many good secretaries do. A congregation would be crippled in its influence and in one of the more important avenues of its public relations.