

Pastor we need to talk!

Chapter 2

What are the sources of your conflict?

Why do congregations and pastors get into trouble? According to Roy W. Pneuman, Senior Consultant, Emeritus, of the Alban Institute, there are nine common sources of conflict in churches.¹ (see Pneuman's Checklist located in the appendix that compliments Pneuman's list in this chapter).

Following each source of conflict that Pneuman identifies, the author suggests a way to prevent this type of conflict in the future.

1. People disagree about values and beliefs.

“Members do not agree about the church’s nature, mission, goals or objectives,” says Pneuman.

Suggestion:

Congregations need to develop a mission statement, that will clarify values and beliefs. When a congregation understands its purpose and goals, members tend to work together with less conflict.

2. The structure is unclear.

There are no clear guidelines about the roles and responsibilities of ministers, staff, laypersons or committees. Pneuman notes: “No one is sure who is to do what; therefore people challenge anything anybody tries to do.”

Suggestions:

Write job descriptions for every staff person, every committee and every organization in the church. Review and update when needed. Share this information openly and freely with the congregation.

3. There is conflict over the pastor’s role and responsibilities.

There is a lack of agreement between pastor and congregation about what activities should be the pastor’s priority.

Suggestions:

Pastors may boast, “God is my boss, not the church. I do what God tells me to do.” When pastors or congregations become controllers “in the name of God,” there will be conflict. Consensus is the key. Neither pastor nor congregation can get 100% of what they want, and neither can they give 100% of what the other party needs. Written surveys and sharing sessions can determine the priorities of both parties.

4. The structure no longer fits the congregation’s size.

Here Pneuman reminds us that when a congregation changes in size, so must the expectations and responsibilities of the pastor and congregation.

Arlin J. Rothauge's small booklet, *Sizing Up A Congregation, For New Member Ministry*, (Episcopal Church Center, 1995) assigns four categories of size: small,

medium, large, and extra large. Rothauge states that understanding the different sizes "prevents us from using one program and one style of leadership for all church situations." He adds that "the size of a congregation acts as a key variable in those factors that determine the structure, functions, and style of relationships in its group life."

Rothauge's research and observations answer five questions that should interest congregations and pastors:

- ❑ What is the basic structure of each type of church: family, pastoral, program, and corporation?
- ❑ How does each category typically attract new members?
- ❑ What are the predominant characteristics of entry of the new member?
- ❑ What are the basic needs of the new member in each size congregation?
- ❑ How might a church most effectively meet those basic needs of a new member?

It would benefit a congregation and pastor to read and study Rothauge's booklet in order to understand a changing congregation.²

Roy M. Oswald in his book, *Making Your Church More Inviting* (Alban Institute, 1992), echoes Rothauge's theory of congregational size and pastoral leadership. Oswald says that "whether churches are growing or downsizing, congregations hold on to deeply engrained assumptions about what constitutes a dynamic church and what effective clergy do. The inflexibility of these expectations is an important cause of clergy malfunctioning."

Following are the four sizes of congregations identified by Rothauge.³

THE FAMILY CHURCH
0-50
ACTIVE MEMBERS
Usual Context: Rural Areas, some
Urban Centers, and Small Towns

"What Family Churches want from clergy is pastoral care," says Oswald. "Clergy are to be the chaplain of this small family which is controlled by patriarchs and matriarchs."

THE PASTORAL CHURCH
50 - 150
ACTIVE MEMBERS
Usual Context: Towns and Suburbia

Oswald reminds us that unlike The Family Church, clergy are usually at the center of a Pastoral Church. Usually a seminary trained pastor and trained lay leaders replace the patriarchs and matriarchs. Keys to success in the The Pastoral Church are open communication between staff and lay persons and the pastor's ability to delegate, assign responsibilities and affirm the accomplishments of others. Without these changes in leadership the whole congregation will become weakened; the pastor will experience burnout and the congregation's fellowship, productivity and unity will degenerate.

THE PROGRAM CHURH
150 - 350
ACITVE MEMBERS
Usual Context: Larger Towns, Urban
and Growing Suburban Areas

In The Program Church there is an even greater need for pastors, staff and lay persons to be trained and to work as a team. Programs are highly emphasized with lay

leaders taking on "pastoral type functions." The pastor acts much like a coach: recruiting, training, supervising, evaluating and motivating congregational leaders.

"Unless the pastor gives high priority to the spiritual and pastoral needs of lay leaders, those programs will suffer," says Oswald.

THE CORPORATION CHURCH
350 - 500 +
ACTIVE MEMBERS
Usual Context: Cities and Metropolitan Areas

In this size church, Oswald says that the congregation's close relationship with senior pastors is willingly sacrificed in favor of the Corporate Church's variety and quality of programs. The make-up of these churches is complex, and the pastor becomes a symbol of unity, stability and motivation for the congregation. The pastor is usually a multi-skilled person with emphasis on leadership more than management.

"While managers can manage the energy of a parish, leaders can *generate* energy," says Oswald. "The Corporate Church needs leaders who know how to build momentum. Otherwise, even when managed well, these large churches run out of gas and begin to decline."

In Summary:

When the congregation's size changes, the change doesn't feel good. It is an understatement to say that congregation and pastor must adjust to the re-sizing. Too often

he and the congregation are aware that the size of their church has changed, but they are not aware that they have not changed their expectations of each other.

Oswald says, "Some of the greatest upheaval caused by numerical growth occurs when a congregation is on the borderline between two sizes." He goes on to say, "When a parish crosses the boundary between one size and another, it needs to begin relating to its clergy in fairly radically different ways than previously."

Too often, pastors are labeled as "bad" pastors when they are simply frustrated pastors because they are trying to function in a larger congregation than they are used to. Similarly, a pastor may feel unfulfilled because his congregation is declining. The congregation no longer demands as much administration and planning as it once did. And it's not because the congregation or the pastor is "bad;" it's because each is unaware that church size has changed.

Suggestions:

Congregations would do well to remember that the size of a congregation imposes unique challenges and limitations upon pastors. The bottom line for the pastor is to feel called to a certain size of congregation. The bottom line for the congregation is to call a suitable person for the size of the congregation.

In essence, the question for each party is, Are we a good match for each other?

(Pastoral search committees can receive a free booklet entitled:

First Things First: What to do before you begin searching for a new pastor or staff person by contacting the author)

5. The pastor's leadership style is mismatched with the congregation.

Pneuman describes leadership style in terms of two dimensions: task and relationship.

Suggestions:

Some pastors are task-oriented. They enjoy administration, meetings, and the planning and leading that is necessary in a congregation. Other pastors are relationship-oriented. They like to mingle with people, build relationships, and discover people's needs and minister to those needs. They enjoy visitation, counseling, pastoral care and activities that keep them close to the people. The conflict comes when a congregation expects a pastor of one orientation to function in the other orientation. Please recognize that both types of pastors are needed. Neither is better than the other. Some pastors even have a good mix of both skills. A congregation needs both skills. But usually pastors have a dominant style of leadership – either in task or relationship. Conflict is reduced when a church takes the time to study what it needs in a pastor. (See the appendix concerning the Intentional Interim Ministry).

Typical Pastor Profile

(Ask your congregation, "What type of Pastor do we need?")

Typical Profile of a Task/Goal Type Pastor	Typical Profile of a Relationship Type Pastor
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stresses importance of goal-setting 2. Enjoys completing goals and projects 3. Enjoys building buildings, starting new programs and ministries 4. Spends time in the church office 5. Enjoys administration, planning, meetings and helping the church accomplish its goals and vision 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stresses building personal relationships 2. Enjoys ministering to individuals 3. Enjoys coaching and building people, helping them to grow in their faith 4. Likes being in the community visiting 5. Enjoys counseling, pastoral care and activities that requires closeness to the people and ministering to needs
<p>A Reminder to Congregations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Neither the "Task" type nor the "Relationship" type pastor is bad - only different. ➤ One pastoral leadership type is not better than the other. ➤ Congregations can benefit from both types of pastors. ➤ At different times in the life of a congregation the congregation may need one type of pastor more than the other type. The key to a long relationship is knowing the needs of the congregation and matching a pastoral leadership type to the congregation. ➤ Congregations need some of both sets of skills in a pastor. When particular skills are lacking in a pastor, the church would do well to practice grace and support their pastor in increasing skills that are lacking. ➤ There are some pastors who have a good mix of skills that are both "Task" and "Relationship" oriented. ➤ Conflict begins when a congregation tries to force one type of pastor to be the other type of pastor. 	

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6. A new pastor rushes into changes.

Pneuman states, "Many new pastors do not take the time and trouble necessary to get to know the congregation before making changes."

Suggestions:

Pastors often say, "The seven words of a dying church are 'we never did it this way before.'" It is true many churches are stuck in tradition. To try to change the time of offering in the worship service, how the Lord's Supper is conducted, or how church officers are elected would be enough to cause a major conflict for a newly elected pastor.

Churches say they want leadership from the new pastor, but often they mean "not right away." Pastors must pay the price of committing themselves to serve the Lord in one congregation long enough to build substantial relationships and trust before they can make significant changes in the life of a congregation. Congregations and pastors must work as a team and enlist the support of one another in decision-making and goal setting. The ministry should not be a Lone Ranger task, either for the pastor or the congregation.

7. Communication lines are blocked.

Pneuman sees poor communication not as the source of conflict but "more a result of conflict than a cause of conflict."

Suggestions:

"One hand must know what the other hand is doing." Secrets, murmuring, gossip, rumors about the congregation or the pastor can damage and destroy relationships, quench the Spirit, sow seeds of discontentment, and create so much disunity that a pastor and congregation can no longer have an effective ministry. A clear and continuous flow

of information from the pulpit – in bulletins, newsletters, and meetings and in daily conversation – is essential to keep the lines of communication open. Likewise, lay leaders and members need to communicate their ideas, responses, thoughts and feelings.

8. Church people manage conflict poorly.

“People seem to believe that conflict is evil and that it shouldn’t happen in the church,” Pneuman observes. And as a result, “Even if conflict is there, we won’t recognize it.”

Suggestions:

According to the Apostle Paul, as long as Christians are in this world, they will be dealing with fleshly desires and impulses. Conflict is inevitable in human beings. One pastor told a couple who came for counseling, “The main problem with your marriage is that you both married sinners.” If couples must recognize that biblical fact, so must churches. Churches must not be surprised when conflict comes. They can work through conflict and move on with a more effective ministry.

9. Disaffected members hold back participation and pledges.

When people are dissatisfied, they will vote with their feet and their money. Pneuman notes, “Unless the pastor is ministering to and listening to all segments of the congregation, sooner or later those who are not being heard will initiate a series of power plays which may result in the pastor’s departure.”

Suggestions:

Once again, the pastor and the congregation must be brave enough to speak up and humble enough to hear the other party's opinion. Openness is the key.

Pneuman adds, "There's nothing in the list that can't be dealt with when the conflict is at the level of constructive disagreement.... Once any of these difficulties escalates to win-lose confrontation, it can be the dynamite that destroys healthy relationships..."

On the following page there is a chart for you to record your church's sources and degree of conflict, based on Pneuman's list.

I. D. Conflict

I. D. (Identify and Discuss) Your Sources of Conflict

Identify the issues that seem to be causing conflict in your church.	RATE THE CONFLICT (1 to 5) (Not to be confused with the level of conflict in chapter, 1) 1. Not a source of conflict 2. Potential source of conflict 3. The beginning of a conflict 4. A growing conflict 5. A major source of conflict	Why is this issue a conflict in your church?
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
Other:		