

Some Common Problems

IN ADDITION TO THE SEVEN "COMMON DIFFICULTIES" TREATED ON PAGES 128-141 IN *CAN THE PASTOR DO IT ALONE?* THE FOLLOWING DIFFICULTIES, SOME OF WHICH ARE VARIATIONS OF THE SEVEN, NEED TO BE ADDRESSED:

REBUFFS
FRUSTRATION
GUILT
NO NEED
MY LIFE: DISORDER

Lay Pastors encounter problems in the process of doing their ministry, out where "the rubber meets the road." The problems test the depth of their commitment, the clarity of their vision and the certainty of their call. If they are merely volunteering to do a task, they may quit when the going gets tough; but if they are obeying God's call to use their spiritual gifts to be "love with skin on it" to people, the problems become challenges. "Come hell or high water", they will stick with it.

Lay Pastor's discouragement and frustrations also test the metal of the leaders. Their commitment and vision are on the line. The problems call them to prayers of desperation, creative thinking, personal consultation and other means of reliable support. If they are convinced that God both called this ministry forth and called them to lead it, their commitments to this ministry and their excitement for it will perpetually enliven the spirits of the lay pastors.

In doing this ministry only a short time, one discovers that it is not a "snap" It takes work, commitment, perseverance and toughness. Paul wrote. "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." There is no ministry without a cross. Jesus never promised that following him into ministry would be easy, but he did promise that some day we would hear the words, "Well done good and faithful servant." Now to the problems several ministry leaders and lay pastors have asked about.

REBUFFS

You are told upon phoning to make arrangements for the First Visit: "I was wondering when you were going to call Before you get started I need to tell you that I have my family and friends to help me if I need help. And what's more, if and when I need a pastor I will call Rev. Smith. You can give your time to someone who needs it."

what do we do with people who break our heart with this sort of unkind or contemptuous refusal? It is a rare response, but, like people who have a rare disease, it doesn't matter that it is rare, it is happening to you. And it can be devastating. What can one do with rebuffs?

For starters, you can take them like Jesus did: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats, Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Or take them like Paul did: "When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered we answer kindly" (1 Corinthians 4:12). Smile. Be kind. Accept them. Love them. Be faithful to them and your commitment to PACE them.

Even if they rebuff you, you can pastor them with **PACE**.

"P" You can *pray* for them faithfully. In fact you have something very special to be praying about, their acceptance of care.

"A" You can be *available* to them. Your attempts to contact them tell them you are there for them when they need you.

"C" You can *contact* them. God will use your cards, letter, brief phone calls, chance meetings on the street, in the store or at church to do something significant in their spirits.

"E" Your *example* of commitment to them, to your church and to Christ will get through to them.

The Lay Pastor must be committed to the relationship, not just to the person. Marriage is an example of this. In marriage, one must be committed to the relationship as well as to the partner. This double commitment will preserve a Lay Pastor's love and affection while in the valley of painful frustration—until they are safely on the other side where love and affection become dearer and stronger because of the time in the valley.

When the relationship is not mutual, the formula MP/MC (maximum prayer/minimum contact) is called for. One Lay Pastor's initiatives were resisted for five years by an older couple assigned to them. However, their faithfulness in prayer and persistence paid off in a break-through one Christmas. They were thrilled and felt adequately rewarded for hanging in there.

Another Lay Pastor's initiatives were spumed. Her strategy was to "back off." She

prayed faithfully. Occasionally, with sensitivity and respect, she made contact. Note that though she backed off she did not "back out." The day came when the young lady who rebuffed her Lay Pastor had a crisis. The Lay Pastor happened to phone again at that time, and she was immediately accepted. What a change!

Only God knew what had been happening during the pastoring attempts. He was building a positive relationship out of negative resistance. The serious crisis revealed what God had been up to. So, you do your part: pray, be patient while persistent, and occasionally contact with sensitivity. While you are doing your part, know that God is doing his part. Time will prove this.

Rebuffed Lay Pastors can borrow Paul's prayer for his Colossian brothers and sisters, "that you may have great endurance and patience" (Colossians 1:11). One may need to keep praying for that endurance and patience for many months or a few years.

Summary:

1. Take the rebuffs like your Lord took them.
2. You can pastor resistant people with PACE even though they are not open to you.
3. Commit to the relationship, not just the person.
4. It is OK to back off, but not to back out.
5. Know that a positive relationship, over time, will grow out of a negative response.
6. Pray and be persistent with sensitivity.

FRUSTRATION

This self-talk is triggered by rebuff. "Now what do I do? Here I give myself to this ministry and this is what I get. I don't know whether I'm angry, hurt, disgusted with myself or sorry that I over got into this. Oh. God help me!"

This is the Lay Pastor's inner emotional state, created by the outer relational state of rebuff or rejection. The receiver is not receiving. The caring initiatives of the lay pastor are opposed and it hurts. Since this miserable state is in the spirit of the Lay Pastor, it must be dealt with in that inner sanctum.

The first thing you must do is **pray**, not for the person resisting you, but for yourself. Ask God what you must do about this situation. Tell him your feelings. Tell him you

want to quit. Then listen. Here is a guarantee – you pray faithfully and something will happen to you and to them, which will surface sooner or later. And it will be something good!

Second, **love** them. Adopt this philosophy, "God loves them and so do I." If we can believe that what Jesus said to his disciples when he sent them out also applies to us as he sends us out, we will see that the rejection is not as much of us as it is of him "He who rejects you rejects me, but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16) God loves them while they are rejecting him, and is trying to reach them with his love through you. To quit is to let God down.

Third, be **patient** with them. Because patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit, number four in Galatians 5:22 in fact, impatience is a sin. To be impatient with them is to be resisting the Spirit. Could it be that the Lord gave us a few resistant people so he could use their resistance as a "grace builder" in our lives. If we get hurt, disgusted or disillusioned and give up, both we and they suffer the loss of what God is wanting to do in both of our lives.

Fourth, have **faith** and **hope**. You recognize these to be spiritual qualities which, in time, surface in a tangible form such as a productive visit in an ex-resister's home. As you pray, love, and practice patience while making an occasional contact with sensitivity, do it in faith. Believe that God is at work through you, Believe that the Spirit is doing something through you. Never give up hope that the warmth of your love and God's love will melt the ice of resistance. The pent-up response will be like melted ice of transformed into a refreshing stream of mutual acceptance and love. The lone-awaited relationship comes alive.

Fifth, be **persistent**. But be sure your persistence is laced with sensitivity and respect. Undue insistence, too frequent contacts of unthinking pushiness will be counterproductive. You will come across to them rude, irritating and obnoxious. The other extreme, to back out, is to fail God who calls his church to tend all the flock, especially those who are resistant. Covert your self-talk to prayer, setting goals and creating action steps. Such conversion will replace the frustration with hope, trust, optimism and joy.

One goal could be to enlist two people to pray for you in this challenging situation. The first action step could be either to ask them to come to your home to talk about something important to you or to take them to lunch and talk about it there. I advise that the rules of confidentiality be respected, that you only refer to their situation. Do not name the person. Other goals and action steps will come from your praying and asking the advice of your ministry leader.

Summary:

1. Identify frustration as your problem, your inner response to their rebuff or resistance.
2. Pray for yourself first, then for the resisting person
3. Love them. ("God loves them and so do I.")
4. Be patient. Consider their resistance a "grace builder."
5. Have faith and hope Know that God is doing something through you.
6. Be persistent with sensitivity and respect.
7. Set goals and create action steps.

FEELING GUILTY

Guilt can be false guilt or true guilt. It is imperative that a person knows which of the two hounds him.

False guilt is brought on by setting unrealistic expectations for ourselves. We shoot too high either because we don't know what God and our leaders expect of us or because we don't accept our limitations. Then we feel guilty because we have failed to fulfill our self assigned expectations. One example is that we are called to love people, not change them And yet if one of our people is not in church regularly we feel guilty for not getting them there. The question is not, "Did you get that person to come to church?" but, "Do you love that person and are you praying for him or her?" Away with false guilt! Be realistic in your expectations and commitment and affirm yourself often!

Then, there is true guilt. The ministry is not being done. The commitment to contact the people is not being kept. The priority of this ministry has slipped into second or fifth place. The vision has dimmed. Contacts have not been made for a month or two or three. Guilt nibbles at the conscience. Another month goes by Now guilt bites the conscience. Embarrassment is added. "What do I do now?" A few more weeks. Guilt and embarrassment add humiliation. The barrier is now so high that there is no way over. Guilt! Guilt! "What do I do about this?" Many Lay pastors have been caught up in this syndrome.

Lay pastor's guilt is a challenge to the ministry leaders Here is what you can do Make an appointment with the Lay Pastor. Explore what has been done and what has not been done so you have the full picture. Then help the Lay Pastor find where his or her heart is Usually, they want to begin again to fulfill the commitment The next step is to plan how to re-enter. The honorable and practicable way is for the Lay Pastor to level with his or her people. Tell it like it They will renew their expectations. When

this decision is reached, the Lay Pastor and leader seal it in the presence of God in prayer.

Actually, if the leadership is on its toes, the decline will be spotted before it becomes a problem. Reports do not come in. They miss the monthly Lay Pastors' meetings. The pastoral supervision (pages 71–78 and 230–234 in the book) has either not been done or not been done effectively. One of the ministry foundation blocks, accountability, has weakened. If the leaders have not done their job, they must share the guilt. Accountability and support are imperative!

Occasionally it is necessary to let a Lay Pastor withdraw from the ministry. Either they have found that they do not have time for it or have discovered that they do not have pastoral gifts. The challenge for the leaders, then is to help them out of the ministry with their blessing and without compounding the guilt. I helped one lay pastor out of this ministry and into children's ministry for which she had gifts and where her heart was. She was happy and productive in teaching children.

Summary:

1. Identify the kind of guilt: false or true.
2. False guilt: reduce unrealistic expectations.
3. True guilt: confess the ministry lapse, find where your heart is, be honest with the people, and get a new start
4. Good leadership will usually preclude the cause of guilt.
5. Occasionally a Lay Pastor must be released from the ministry with the leader's blessing

NO NEED

"I don't feel the need for a Lay Pastor. Wouldn't it be better to spend your time on someone who has the need." Or the Lay Pastor concludes after a period of time, "These people don't seem to need a Lay Pastor. Can you give me somebody who needs me?"

By observation alone, we could conclude that many people have no need for pastoral care. However, one of the realities driving this ministry is that everybody has needs. Take me for example, a Christian minister who appears to have it all together, who seems to be trouble-free and therefore has no need for pastoral care. Don't be deceived The trouble-free look is only skin deep, whether it's me or someone else. I

need prayer and encouragement I too have problems concerns and worries I need someone to open up to and will do so to the one I have learned to trust If the relationship is deep enough, cultivated over a period of time with genuine concerns and love, I will be ready to "spill my gut" when the time is right Occasionally someone has broken through to my need and it felt good. In fact, it was therapeutic.

Assume that every person needs pastoral care in the context of a relationship created out of genuine concern and love In other words, to conclude that one has no need for pastoral care, is unwarranted Pastoral care, when understood to be a relationship laced with concern and love, is as basic to life as food and water.

We need to expand our understanding of "need to include another set of needs for pastoral care such as:

- 1) The need to grow spiritually.
- 2) The need for encouragement in life's pursuits.
- 3) The need for affirmation (congratulations, pats on the back, commendations, acknowledgements).
- 4) The need for someone to heighten the joy of celebrative events such as birthdays, anniversaries, births, new job, retirement, etc.
- 5) The need to pray about people's everyday matters.

For example, a church officer, whom most people would conclude has no need for pastoral care, needs someone praying for him or her regarding the issues he or she faces as a member of the board. Even the church officer himself may not be aware of this need until the Lay Pastor offers to support him or her in prayer, asking, "Could you tell me some of the issues the board is dealing with so I can pray for you with specifics?"

As a professional pastor, I am thrilled and feel supported when someone assures me they will be praying for me about specific decision, involvement and other heavy matters. I need this kind of care.

Then there are the latent needs. Sooner or later, everyone gets has an accident or suffers reverses of some kind. The ideal pastoral relationship is built while things are going good in the person's life so that when the chips are down they already know they have someone to whom they can turn, someone whom they can trust with their fears and pain.

I deal with this problem in my book, *Can The Pastor Do It Alone?*(pages 136–139) I speak of a "non-crisis initiative."

"The reasons it is a relatively simple pastoral act to respond to a crisis such as a sickness, injury, loss of job, fire, death, and to such happy events as marriage, birth of children, graduation and birthdays is that these crises and events provide a very simple process: crisis and response.

"There are these four elements in a crisis purpose, time, notification and focus

1. The purpose is identified by the need, For example, a person is rushed to the hospital The purpose for a pastoral call is already identified.
2. The time is set, The person is in the hospital now.
3. You are notified of the crisis Someone has given you the information to which you respond There is nothing to initiate.
4. The focus is the crisis Deciding what you will do, out of a wide range of possibilities, is narrowed for you. You will bring a sense of the presence of God into the room of a troubled person.

"In initiating a non-crisis contact the Lay Pastor must do these same four things on his or her own initiative:

1. Identify the purpose, Examples may be:
 - a) A desire to know the person better
 - b) "touch base" to see if everyone in the family is okay
 - c) Talk about some matter of spiritual nurture
2. Set the time. When there is not a crisis it is not urgent that the contact be made today or this week. That is the problem. Without procrastinating you have to determine your own time and negotiate an appointment convenient to the flock member.
3. Take the initiative in contacting. The Lay Pastor cannot wait to be notified by the family that they want to visit is very rare that a flock member will call a Lay Pastor unless there is a problem.
4. Establish the agenda "I just stopped by to visit, to get better acquainted and to see if everything going along fine."

Summary:

1. Know that everyone, without exception, has need of pastoral care. Assume this
2. Expand your understanding of "need" to include spiritual growth, encouragement, affirmation and the like.

3. Know that there are latent needs. The ideal pastoral relationship is built while things are going well.
4. In non-crisis times you have to establish the need, set the time, take the initiative and determine the agenda.

MY OWN LIFE IS OUT OF ORDER

"How can I serve my flock when I myself have problems?"

"What kind of example am I setting when my wife and children are in rebellion towards God?"

"How can I reconcile having a ministry to others while struggling with sin or problems or failures in my own life?"

The fact is that all of us are struggling with all of the above to one degree or another. One pastor preached, "I want you to know this about me, I can preach this better than I can practice it." Laypeople like to think that their pastor is without sin. Pastors like to think that some of their laypeople are without sin. But, 1 John 1:8 includes us all: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Our question is whom is God going to use if the cannot use struggling people? Observing the lives of Biblical heroes answers the question. God uses people struggling with sin, problems, imperfections and habits. That doesn't excuse us. It just answers our question.

Three principles help us deal responsibly with this pseudo reason to either quit the ministry or to not answer the call of God to do the ministry in the first place.

1. Be sure this is no "cop out", as we would say. They need to know in their own heart that this is not a rationalization of an inner and repressed desire to quit the ministry for some known or unknown reason. It involves a basic inner searching for which ministry God has given them spiritual gifts and their willingness to be his servant in the use of these spiritual gifts.
2. This moral, relational or spiritual disorder is to be looked on in the same way we look at a physical disorder, an asset to ministry Henri Nouwen's idea of "Wounded Healer" is the principle. Struggling with a spouse or children who are in rebellion toward God will enable a Lay Pastor to truly understand those

in his or her flock who are having the same or similar struggles. The Lay Pastor's painful circumstance raises the empathy aptitude. To minister to others when one's life is not in order requires these three conditions.

- a) That any guilt of sin is confessed and forgiveness accepted.
 - b) That one is open to sharing the struggle when asked or when it is appropriate to volunteer the information. An example is the senior pastor of a church with whom I am acquainted. His son was recently divorced. He is not hiding this fact, nor is he broadcasting it, but is very open to talking about it when it is appropriate. His own personal life is an example of Christ-centeredness. His son's life does not limit his effectiveness in Christian ministry. It actually helps people to be encouraged in their struggles when they know that their pastor suffers some of the same.
 - c) That the person feels called to do this ministry. This is the most important condition for continuing. The call can be explored and if it is there to reaffirm it and renew commitment to it. Ideally, a time of prayer is in order at this point. Earnest prayer will give the struggling person the assurance that God is most certainly renewing his call and will continue to give his Spirit, thereby making the ministry effective.
3. A possible leave of absence. We gave one Lay Pastor six months off because his life situation was so difficult that he needed to be relieved of the ministry temporarily. One could be given as much as a year's leave of absence to provide time to get over the hump and be ready again to minister as a Lay Pastor. Explanation needs to be given to the flock, not the details but just that his or her life situation requires a leave of absence. This can be given in writing, a phone call or a personal visit.

The last course of action to be considered, assuming that you have worked satisfactorily with these three principles, is to resign from the ministry. If this is the decision, the ministry leader(s) must help the Lay Pastor out of the ministry without compounding his or her struggle and without adding guilt to an already discouraging ordeal. These steps must be taken so as to help rather than hurt the person further.

1. **Listen** – Try to hear the person's feelings in addition to the story. Help him or her deal with those feelings. Listening with empathy, warmth and respect (feeling, love and deference) will encourage him or her to "get it all out" so they feel good rather than guilty about leaving the ministry.

2. **Listen** – Do not "problem solve" This is not the time to try to counsel regarding the details of the struggle. Good listening will create peacefulness to the spirit and start the person's creative juices flowing, enabling this person to either solve or successfully cope with the problems.

3. **Listen** – You will want to pray with and for this person, By listening carefully both to the feelings and story you will be able to pray with specifics while with him or her as well as in your own private intercessory prayer time.

4. **Pastor** – They need to experience what it is to be cared for when the chips are down. The genuine empathy and concern for them which you are experiencing within you will surface in such a way that the Lay Pastor will know you are there for him or her Touching base with them frequently will assure them that you care for them as a person, that your major concern is for them, not the ministry they are no longer doing.

5. **Closure** – Some final statement followed with a prayer should declare the ministry finished. Occasionally we have brought a Lay Pastor's ministry to a close, regardless of the reason, by publicly making the announcement at a regular meeting of our Lay Pastors, following the announcement with special prayer for him or her A few have been open to sharing some parting words. However closure is reached, it should leave the person feeling loved, affirmed and cared for, not quality, judged or lonely. The door should always be left open for them to return to the ministry in the future.

Summary:

1. God uses imperfect people for ministry, people who are struggling with personal, relational or faith problems.
2. Be sure the discouraged person's reason for quitting the ministry is not a "cop out".
3. A disorder of any kind can be an asset to one's ministry, assuming
 - a) That sin is confessed and absolved;
 - b) That one is open to disclosing the struggle;
 - c) That the person feels called to do this ministry.
4. It may be necessary to give this one a leave of absence.
5. The last course of action is resigning. When this decision is made the ministry leader must take these steps: listen, care for and bring this person's ministry to a fitting closure.

In conclusion, lest this Monograph give the impression that the Lay Pastors Ministry is

heavily laden with problems. Read this impressive list of statements They are a sampling of those written by Lay Pastors of one church in response to the question: "What are three of your most satisfying pastoral experiences?"

1. Praying with family members and seeing results.
2. Feeling I was there for a lonely person.
3. Getting to know some church members better.
4. Being able to converse about the Lord freely.
5. Providing linkage to the church that these people haven't experienced on a regular basis.
6. Being told by one that she counts on my prayers.
7. Being part of a network of supporters for one woman during a crisis with a teenager.
8. Brightening their day by a visit.
9. Seeing people get help
10. Being able to see our relationship grow.
11. Sharing in their joys and concerns.
12. Making friends with people I would not have know
13. Helping in a time of deep sorrow.
14. Finding that they sometimes minister to me more than I do them.