
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Check the Bullies: Part 1

Church bullies exist, and pastors must often deal with them. They may be called other names, such as, power broker, controller, trouble maker, church boss, or, a particular favorite, Clyde (as in co-llide!).

Bulling is best defined as repeated, aggressive behavior intended to hurt another person or group of persons, with the agenda of gaining power and control. Bullying is a type of abusive power. When exercised in a church, it not only hurts the pastor, but the entire congregation, as the people live in fear of the bully.

It's easy to point out the schoolyard bully, but church bullies are more sophisticated. They use tactics that sound spiritual, and normally practice them in the quietness of unseen lunches, board meetings, or one-on-one conversations. Their behavior is usually not observed by a majority of the congregation, which allows them to fly under the radar.

It's difficult to know how to handle them, since everyone's expected to be nice at church. They're especially dangerous when they maneuver themselves into official positions. They don't need an official position to bully others, but they do need an enemy, that is, someone to fight.

The Apostle John talks about one such bully. "I wrote something to the Church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good" (III John 9-11).

John mentions five characteristics that define a bully. 1) They love self-exaltation and pride (v. 9); 2) They reject counsel (v. 9); 3) They make unjust accusations against leaders (v. 10); 4) They are not warm to other brothers and sisters in Christ (v.10); and 5) They try to dominate others (v.10).

The underlying motives of church bullies are always power and control, that is, they want the power and control in the church.

**Put Dr. Gary L. McIntosh on
your coaching team.**

**Email cgnet@earthlink.net
for full details.**

Here are a number of bullying tactics pastors often face.

Spreading rumors. One type of church bully is the church tattletale. They are nosy, and constantly monitor the pastor's activities.

Getting angry. Some bullies yell, scream, throw tantrums, or otherwise show anger in an effort to intimidate or humiliate others.

Making false accusations. They accuse others of making mistakes, statements they didn't make, and being unbiblical. The accusations are used in an attempt to discredit others.

Glaring or staring. Bullies try to intimate others by glaring intently at them. They fold their arms, turn away, or roll their eyes at others.

Forging allies. Bullies like to gather supporters in an effort to feel more powerful. They may encourage others to join them in criticizing the pastor.

Dismissing comments. Attempting to embarrass others is a key tactic of bullies. Making side comments, like, "Oh, that's silly," or "Humph, no one believes that," and other similar types of comments, all serve as ways to show disrespect.

Using silence. Giving others the silent treatment to ostracize them is a common tactic of church bullies. Phone calls go unanswered, emails receive no reply, requests for meetings are unheeded.

Making demands. A bully may make ridiculous demands, such as, an impossible deadline or unreasonable request, knowing that they can't be met.

Retaliating. If a pastor tries to control, speak against, or report bullying behavior, the bully may react negatively. A bully may use insults, increased oversight, or by using some of the other tactics already noted.

Dealing with church bullies is uncomfortable at the least, and dangerous to one's ministry in the most. It's complicated, but dealing with bullies is a necessary aspect of leading a church.

Ignoring bullies leaves the church in serious danger. Be careful. When bullies use you for negative carping, complaining, grousing, glitching, and gossip. This sort of behavior is agenda-driven.

Have you ever observed a church bully?

Which of the bullying tactics mentioned have you seen used?

In what ways did the bully intimidate others?

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