

When churches and pastors part: A bad goodbye, Part 2

May 20, 2020

In [Part 1](#), I looked at how admitting when a pastor and a church are a bad match—and calling off the pursuit—is better than denying the problems and moving forward with employment.

Here, I want to look at a common occurrence that ends established pastorates.

A common scenario

On a regular basis, I talk to pastors and churches where the following has occurred:

The pastor finished leading Wednesday night Bible study.

A “friend” approached the pastor and asked, “Could we talk for a few minutes in your office?”

The pastor discovered there was a small group already in the pastor’s office, and the “friend” revealed these others were to be part of the conversation.

The spokesperson for the group told the pastor: “We want your resignation. If you don’t give it to us right now (or in other cases, within the next few days), we will go to the church and get you voted out. We have the votes to do it.”

Sometimes this is done with no explanation. Sometimes an explanation already is known, because members of the group have been complaining to

the pastor for some time. And sometimes, the pastor asks for an explanation, and the group simply says, “Lots of people feel like we do, because you just aren’t ‘feeding us’ anymore.”

The pastor tenders the resignation, sometimes in exchange for a month or two of severance pay. More likely, the pastor only gets paid for the vacation time that is due, because: “Well, after all, the pastor resigned. The pastor didn’t get ‘fired.’”

Examining behind the scenes

Now, let’s break it down further into two common “behind the scenes” sets of information.

The church is in pretty good health. Ministries are functioning well, and the pastor is loved and appreciated by 90 to 95 percent of the church members.

The smaller group, however, has a ringleader who secretly has called followers to action. The followers take turns complaining to the pastor, the pastor’s spouse, and even to the pastor’s children.

The pastor eventually feels beat up. The pastor gets emotionally tired, then worn out, and finally just totally burned out.

The pastor “hunkers down” and finds it hard to do ministry, to prepare a sermon or to put on a good face for Sundays. The pastor’s spouse takes it even harder.

When the group pounces, often in a time of pastoral weakness—like just after losing a parent or having a health crisis—the pastor caves into their demand and resigns.

I’ve been known to say: “The little group didn’t run off the pastor. It was the majority doing nothing about the smaller group that led to the pastor’s

departure.”

Often, there certainly is a great deal of truth to that statement. But over the years, I’ve discovered another important truth. The majority didn’t do anything because they didn’t know anything. The pastor never told a soul what was going on.

Learning from others

The [first lesson](#) from a bad goodbye was: **A courtship goodbye is better than consummating a mistake.**

The second lesson from a bad goodbye is: **Pastors who avoid conflict often hurt themselves, their church and the kingdom of God.**

Don’t let conflict go on without doing something about it.

1. Talk with your mentor, coach and/or peer group.
2. Share openly with your lay leadership, and keep them in the loop. Ask for their help.
3. Seek outside professional assistance. This may or may not be available through denominational portals.

Unfortunately, while the small group’s methodology as described above may be improper and unbiblical, this group sometimes has legitimate concerns. We’ll look at that scenario in Part 3.

Karl Fickling is the coordinator of interim ministry for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.