
WHAT TO DO BEFORE: A FIGHT BREAKS OUT

Episode Description

Sometimes *it* just happens. A slip of the tongue (or not) and someone either takes exception or disagrees ... strongly. Or someone undermines someone else or some project or ... The list of why we fight at church is unending. It's not supposed to be that way, but *it* happens. The question is, what to do about it. When Tom won't speak to Bob or refuses to attend until Bob is replaced ... what's a pastor or a church leader to do? In this episode Drs. Kris and Bill offer practical steps to take when you're faced with *it* happening.

Episode Outline

You might as well face it, there's going to be conflict. If you're blessed to be in a church that's essentially a "conflict free zone" then now is the time to make sure you develop a Conflict Prevention and Reconciliation plan – see the Conflict CPR DVD training tool at EffectiveChurch.net.

Remember Two Things:

1. *Ignoring or whitewashing conflict will always bite you in the future – it never goes away on its own (so long as the combatants remain in or connected to the church). And the pain of putting it off will be greater than the pain of addressing it NOW.*
2. There are steps we can take to keep conflict healthy and prevent fights from breaking out.

Initial Steps

- **Consider the places from where conflict seems to emanate: particular classes or groups, a committee or department, after-church lunch buddies, the choir, etc. Look at the "leaders" (positional and otherwise) and consider whether or not they may display the characteristics of controllers, bullies, terrorists, or guerillas.**
 - **Controller:** Someone who refuses to let go and is willing to manipulate to maintain that control
 - **Bully:** Someone with pedigree who demonstrates behavior similar to that of playground "bullies" (name calling, threatening to take some kind of action)
 - **Terrorist:** Someone who believes they have power and makes threats that try to take the church hostage ("If you ___ then I'll ___")

- **Guerilla:** Someone who lies in wait for changes or interruptions, no matter how seemingly small or insignificant, so they can subversively flame anxiety, shift the congregation's focus to a pet issue or "problem" that's been simmering on a back burner, and ambush the leadership by catching them with their energy focused elsewhere
- **Refrain from labeling and scape-goating people.**
 - It's one thing to treat someone as a terrorist; it's another to call them a "terrorist."
 - It's important to identify behaviors but we have to be careful not to place all the congregation's problems on him or her. When we do, the behaviors will transfer on to someone else once the scapegoat leaves.
- **Develop and have your congregation adopt *Expected Behaviours* (aka a *Covenant of Conduct*, a *Congregational Covenant*, *Discipleship Behaviours*, etc.) and a *Leadership Covenant*)**
 - Start with the *One-Anothers for the Church* (developed by Bill Tenny-Brittian and found in *The Flip My Church Workbook* by Kris Tenny-Brittian)
 - Make sure to include Matthew 18.15-17 as one of the *Behaviours*.
- **Develop and have your congregation adopt its *Values*, *Mission*, and *Vision*.**
 - Continually keep these in front of the congregation on every written items: newsletters, bulletins, websites, etc.
 - Every Sunday make reference to the *Mission*, part of the *Vision*, or one of the *Values*. Be creative. Refer to them in the introduction to Communion/Eucharist, Offering, Sermon, or Closing Song.
- **Find ways to "gently remind" – *not* scold – people of the congregation when they act in ways that are not in accordance with your *Behaviours*.**
 - Make sure *you* walk the talk, as well as the walk.
 - Keep this as win-win as possible
 - Keep these reminders public and remember that this is an opportunity to reach and teach.
- **Get whatever help you may need to raise your self-esteem and prepare to stand-up to rather than retreat from situations in which conflict is present or promised ... or feared.**
- **Learn and teach your leaders how to "speak the Truth in love."**
- Read *Speaking the Truth in Love: How to be an Assertive Christian* by Ruth N. Koch and Kenneth C. Haugk (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1988).
- **Learn and teach your leaders how to be assertive not aggressive and how to be responsive rather than reactionary.**
 - Read *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* by Kenneth C. Haugk (St. Louis, MO: Stephen Ministries, 1992).

Discussion

1. What are your congregation's *Expected Behaviours*?
2. If you don't have them, why not? What, or who, prevents you from developing them?
3. Are the conflicts personal or corporate?
4. If they're corporate, determine whether they are being caused or perpetuated by controllers, bullies, terrorists, or guerillas? Is it possible the same people are involved with more than one conflict?
5. Choose the conflict you could most easily address. What steps would you follow to address it?
6. Who would you need to help and/or support you? A judicatory minister? An objective professional in the community who has no relationship with the congregation? A consultant? A coach experienced in conflict intervention?
7. What will you do next? When? Who will do what?
8. If you choose not follow through on Question 5, what prevents you from addressing the conflict? Be careful that your *reasons* aren't really *excuses* and that "*waiting until next month*" isn't really *procrastination*.