

Nine Ways to Deal with Church Bullies

by Thom Rainer

In my post on Monday, I dealt with the traits of church bullies. I now move from descriptive to prescriptive. How do we deal with church bullies? What can we do to prevent such bullying? Here are nine of my suggestions:

Fight bullying with the power of prayer. The most common targets of church bullies are the pastor and church staff. I encourage everyone in vocational ministry to ask humbly for people to pray for them daily. In two of the churches where I served as pastor, I had as many as 100 or more people committed to pray for me daily. They typically prayed for me for only two or three minutes each day at noon. Their intercessory prayers for me were brief, but they were powerful!

Seek to have an Acts 6 group in the church. I am specifically referring to the manner in which the Jerusalem church dealt with murmuring and complaining. They appointed a group to take care of the widows who were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The seven who were appointed to the task were thus not only to do that ministry, but they were also to preserve the unity of the church. Churches need either informal or formal groups that see their ministry as dealing with conflict, complaints, and dissension so that unity is preserved.

Have a high expectation church. I have addressed the issues of high expectation churches and low expectation churches many times on this blog. Higher expectation churches tend to be more unified, more Great Commission focused, more biblically defined, and more servant oriented. Stated simply, high expectation churches don't offer an environment conducive to bullying.

Encourage members to speak and stand up to church bullies. Bullying thrives in a church where the majority remains in silent fear of church bullies. Bullies tend to back down when confronted by strong people in the church. We just need more strong people in the church.

Make certain the polity of the church does not become a useful instrument to church bullies. Many churches have ambiguous structures and lines of accountability. Polity is weak and ill-defined. Bullies take advantage of the ambiguity and interpret things according to their nefarious needs.

Be willing to exercise church discipline. Church discipline is a forgotten essential of many churches. Bullies need to know there are consequences for their actions, and church discipline may be one of them.

Have a healthy process to put the best-qualified persons in positions of leadership in the church. Bullies often are able to push around less qualified people who have found themselves in positions of leadership. There should be a spiritually and strategically designed process to choose and recruit people for key leadership positions.

Have a healthy process to hire church staff. For example, an egregious mistake would be the church's hiring of a senior staff member without the enthusiastic support of the pastor. If the pastor and new staff member do not have good chemistry, a church bully can quickly pit one against the other. A unified church staff is a major roadblock for a church bully.

Encourage a celebratory environment in the church. Joyous churches deter bullies. They like somber and divided churches.

Church bullying is more widespread than we often like to admit. I hope these nine suggestions can help keep the bullies out of your church. Let me hear from you.