The Young and the Clueless

A young, woman clergy leader is challenged (and bullied) by an older patriarch of the congregation.

Pastor: Hi, John. Wasn’t that a great meeting? I feel that we’re really making some progress!
John: Well, people like you here, pastor. We want to make sure you feel supported.
Pastor: Oh, but this isn’t about me. I just want to get people excited about ministry! I think we can do some really good work in the community.
John: As long as we don’t get carried away. We always get new pastors who are full of energy and idealism. We don’t want to dampen your enthusiasm.
Pastor: So, wait. You mean people are agreeing with me because they want me to feel good? I thought people were getting excited about my ideas.
John: Oh, we like your ideas fine, but you need to realize who you’re dealing with. We’ve been around a long time, and we’ve broken in a lot of new pastors. We’ll get you whipped into shape in no time!
Pastor: (beginning to get defensive): Whip me into shape? I know what I’m doing. I don’t need you to teach me how to do my job!
John: Hey, calm down, nobody expects you to know everything. Until you’ve been around and done this awhile, it’s to be expected that some of your ideas will be unrealistic or off-the-wall. You know, one thing you’ll learn as you get a little older is that we “old folks” actually know some things. Relax.
Pastor: (fully arriving at defensive): Don’t tell me to relax! You’re telling me that people here are humoring me – because I’m young?!
John: Well, that, and you’re a woman...
Pastor: (pauses for a lonnnnggg moment, staring at John. Says slowly, trying to control herself) I... find... that... incredibly... insulting. My age and my gender have nothing to do with my ability to do this job. I am an ordained minister...
John: Nobody said you can’t do your job. It’s just that you’re rough around the edges. You lack experience. And, let’s be honest, you’re a sweet, single woman whose gonna need to balance work and family someday, and this is the time in your life to explore your options and decide what kind of life you want.
Pastor: What!! This is my life – I’m not doing this until I figure out what I want. And whether I marry or not has nothing to do with this. I am the pastoral leader of this congregation, and I demand to be respected.
John: Now see, calm down, this is what I’m talking about. You’re getting all emotional and upset. Nobody is disrespecting you. We all like you. We all think you’ll be a fine pastor someday.
Pastor: (obviously hurt): But not now – you don’t think I’m a fine pastor now?
John: You’re young. You’ll learn. And I promise you, you won’t find a more patient congregation anywhere. We don’t mind being guinea pigs – you can try things out here and we’ll support you. How else will you learn?
Pastor: John, I literally do not know what to say. I find this conversation offensive and demeaning. I think you’re being condescending and I don’t appreciate it.
John: See, that’s what I mean. Get a few more years under your belt, and you’ll be able to handle constructive criticism. It’ll come. Just give it time. And if you get yourself in trouble, don’t hesitate to call on any of us – we’ll teach you.
Pastor: I don’t think that will be necessary. Is that all?
John: Yep. Don’t you worry. Everybody has to start somewhere. You’ll get the hang of this, but don’t try to do it alone. We’ve done this before – you can learn a lot from us.

Wisconsin Annual Conference

Dan R. Dick 2010
General Hospitable

Can pastor and spouse find true happiness when the demands of the church eclipse the promises made to protect hearth and home?

Spouse: Honey, who was that on the phone?
Pastor: Just Ed with a quick question. The Trustees need to make a decision by Sunday, so he wanted to get my input.
Spouse: (irritated) I thought we agreed that you wouldn’t take calls while you’re home for dinner with the family.
Pastor: Yeah, well, supper isn’t ready yet, and anyway, I knew it wouldn’t take long.
Spouse: That’s beside the point. You made a promise. It’s getting so we never have you fully to ourselves anymore.
Pastor: It isn’t that bad. He’s going to swing by and pick up some papers, then he’ll be gone, and you’ll have me all to yourselves.
Spouse: Whoa, whoa. Ed is coming here? Friday night is supposed to be ours—no visitors, no interruptions, just time when we can relax and be together. People show up here all the time. Can’t we have even one day where we don’t have to be ready for company?
Pastor: Ed won’t stay. He’s just stopping for a minute. Don’t make a big deal out of this.
Spouse: But it is a big deal. You promised. You said Friday and Saturday would be specifically set aside for the family, but you always let something come up.
Pastor: I don’t “let” things come up; they just do! I don’t have a normal 9-to-5 job. I’m on call 24-7.
Spouse: But we’re out. We’re your family, and it seems like we always come in second. You don’t cancel church events for us, but you change all kinds of family plans to suit the church.
Pastor: Occasionally that’s true, but it doesn’t happen all the time.
Spouse: No, not all the time. We have some of your time tomorrow, but last Saturday was the rummage sale that you HAD to be at, and the week before that was a wedding, and before that you led the planning retreat, and next week you have the CROP Walk, and tonight Ed is stopping by. It isn’t fair.
Pastor: Fair has nothing to do with it. This is my job. I am expected to be available when people need me. A lot depends on me.
Spouse: But we depend on you, too, and we want you to care about us as much as you care about your work.
Pastor: Now who’s not being fair? I don’t neglect you and I don’t need to be made to feel guilty for being responsible. You know I love you and you always have me, but I’m trying to be a good leader for the church.
Spouse: I know you have to do your job, but I don’t think it is too much to ask for you to set aside a little of your time just for us.
Pastor: I’ll try to be better about it. I’m sorry... Oh, there’s Ed. I need to go answer the door.
Healthy Boundaries Role-plays and Scenarios

Die-Nasty

Loose lips sink ships and destroy reputations and trust. Even pastors can fuel toxic situations and create awkward situations by ignoring boundaries. Let’s listen to a well-intentioned pastor abuse power with the church council chair.

Pastor: I am so tired of Mike mouthing off at every meeting.
Chair: He can be negative...
Pastor: Not just negative. I can hardly stand him, he is such a know-it-all.
Chair: (uncomfortable) But he means well. He can be overbearing, but he is trying to do what’s right for the church.
Pastor: I’m not so sure. I think Mike only cares about Mike. He challenges everything I say. He has no respect for me at all.
Chair: Do you have respect for him?
Pastor: Oh, sure. I know he’s a smart guy, but he acts like he knows more than everyone else. He makes it so hard to get anything done.
Chair: He does ask a lot of questions, and he does like to make speeches, but I think he’s trying to be careful.
Pastor: Careful? I think he’d like it if we never made any decisions. It drives me crazy that we have to go over the same things again and again. I know he’s educated, but I’m not so sure he’s very bright.
Chair: He can be difficult. But I’m not sure you should question his intelligence. Have you tried talking directly to him?
Pastor: I had a meeting with him in my office, but we didn’t get anywhere. He wasn’t interested in anything I had to say. I told him if he didn’t shape up, he could be replaced. He told me he’s been here longer than me, and he’ll be here long after I’m gone, so he wasn’t worried. Can you believe the nerve of some people?
Chair: Well, it sounds like you threatened him.
Pastor: I just tried to get him to be a team player. I know he’s got some problems, so I try to give him some slack, but at some point you have to draw the line. You know he’s got a drinking problem...
Chair: Uh, no, I don’t know that... and I’m not sure why you told me.
Pastor: Just that he has control problems. I think it explains a lot.
Chair: How do you know he has a drinking problem?
Pastor: He told me himself a few years ago. He’s working to control it, but...
Chair: You know? I’m not happy with you telling me this. This isn’t the kind of thing you should share with other people. I’m sure Mike doesn’t want this spread around. I’m a little surprised that you said anything.
Pastor: Oh, I don’t mean any harm. I DO think it’s important for you to know, just in case we need to deal with Mike sometime in the future. I truly think our committee would be a lot better off if we could find someone to replace him.

Wisconsin Annual Conference

Dan R. Dick 2010
**The Secret Storm**

_**Sweet Sue (super-Christian, prayer warrior, look of concern frozen on her face) brings “news” to the pastor about problems in the congregation._

Sue: Pastor, I don’t know if you’re aware of a few situations in the church right now that I think need to be addressed.

Pastor: Such as?

Sue: Tim and Sally. They haven’t been here for weeks. I think they may be having problems, you know, in their marriage.

Pastor: Oh? Have you heard something?

Sue: Well, not exactly, but at prayer group we started talking and their son was in trouble at school recently, and my daughter told me that their daughter missed almost a week of school.

Pastor: And what, exactly, does that have to do with Tim and Sally’s marriage?

Sue: Don’t you think these things are curious? All the women are talking about it. Geena saw Sally crying in her car, and she asked what was wrong, and you know what Sally said to her?

Pastor: What?

Sue: Nothing! She said “nothing” was wrong. (Sue leans back looking like she has proven a point.)

Pastor: Uhm . . . okay. I’m not sure I see where you’re going with this...

Sue: Well, why would she say “nothing”? If it was “nothing,” she would have said what it was. The only reason she would say it was “nothing” was if it was “something” she didn’t want to talk about!

Pastor: (looking nonplussed) I don’t think we should go jumping to conclusions here.

Sue: Jumping to conclusions? We’re not jumping to conclusions. We’re concerned. I shared my concerns at United Methodist Women yesterday so we could all keep Tim and Sally and the kids in our prayers.

Pastor: You didn’t?! Sue, don’t spread rumors like that!

Sue: (looking like she’s been slapped) Rumors!! I don’t spread rumors. I’m worried about members of my church family, and quite frankly, I am appalled at your lack of interest. I cannot understand why you care so little about a family in our congregation. Perhaps you’re too busy to minister to people in crisis?

Pastor: Sue, it hasn’t been established that there is a crisis. We don’t KNOW anything about what is going on. Please don’t share your suspicions and conjectures with other people. They might think there is more substance to your “concerns” than there actually is.

Sue: (indignant) You know? The prayer group said you might react like this, but I didn’t believe them. I said, “no, pastor is a caring person, we can count on our pastor, our pastor will want to know this.” But everyone there had a story to tell of a time they had a special need or crisis in their life where they expected you to visit or care for them, and you let them down...

Pastor: Really? Could you be more specific?


Pastor: Karen Wilson?

Sue: Ed and Terry’s daughter. She had her baby and you never contacted the family at all.

Pastor: Their daughter who lives in California? The daughter they aren’t on speaking terms with?

Sue: Doesn’t change your responsibility.

Pastor: Who else?

Sue: Mabel Gaines.

Pastor: Mabel Gaines isn’t part of the prayer circle. She doesn’t even go here.

Sue: No, but she’s my best friend and I told you she was in the hospital.
Healthy Boundaries Role-plays and Scenarios

Pastor: And I told you I was very sorry.
Sue: But you didn’t go visit her.
Pastor: She doesn’t belong to this church! Who else?
Sue: (pausing) I can’t remember.
Pastor: So, two people are upset with me.
Sue: Well, at least two I remember.
Pastor: Okay, well, I will check in with Tim and Sally.
Sue: Don’t bother. I’m heading there now. I want them to know that SOMEBODY cares for them.
Healthy Boundaries Role-plays and Scenarios

As The Church Turns

When a windfall gift drops in the lap of a struggling church, the true colors of the pastor and laity come into the light.

(Print three separate parts, divided at lines. Each should include the opening paragraph and the individual descriptive paragraph for each player.)

The pastor, the chair of finance, and the chair of the church council meet to discuss how to decide the best way to use a $100,000 bequest to the church. No prior discussion has occurred with any official board or committee in the congregation. The pastor requested this meeting.

#1 – The Pastor – the pastor wants to spend the money to purchase projection and sound equipment for the sanctuary to use PowerPoint and lead a more modern style worship service. He/she does not care for the finance chair and has a long-standing history of emotional disagreements. He/she knows that the finance chair will want to save/invest the money. He/she knows the church council chair will want to spend the money on community projects for the poor and homeless. He/she knows that the church council chair has been under terrible stress in his/her work and at home, and that he/she is very anxious and edgy. The pastor called this meeting to inform the chair of Finance and the Council chair that he/she has gathered bids on having the tech work done in the sanctuary.

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#2 – Chair of Finance – the finance chair wants to save the money, and will not entertain any suggestion of spending the money. He/she knows that the pastor is not a good giver and that the church council chair has stopped giving altogether. He/she feels free to use this information to make the case that only good givers should be allowed to make financial decisions on behalf of the church. He/she secretly thinks he/she is smarter and wiser than both of the others.

The pastor, the chair of finance, and the chair of the church council meet to discuss how to decide the best way to use a $100,000 bequest to the church. No prior discussion has occurred with any official board or committee in the congregation. The pastor requested this meeting.

#3 – Council Chair – the chair of the council is fed up with both the pastor and the finance chair, and is ready to say what he/she is really feeling. He/she believes that ANY use of the money other than for the poor is unchristian and unworthy of the church. Only people who lack faith and are selfish would insist on spending it on the church or saving it. The council chair has a folder of letters of complaint about the pastor that have been shared in confidence about a variety of topics including bad preaching, not visiting, and not keeping his/her word. As the discussion unfolds, the council chair feels free to talk about these complaints.

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Healthy Boundaries Role-plays and Scenarios

The Daze of Our Lives

Everyone agrees the church needs to change, until someone tries to change it.

(Print three separate parts, divided at lines. Each should include the opening paragraph and the individual descriptive paragraph for each player.)

In a short period of time, a new pastor removes memorial gifts from the sanctuary, rearranges furniture and fixtures in the sanctuary and church parlor, changes the order of worship (including the style of communion), introduces new hymns and music, and makes massive changes to the church website. When he/she was hired, he/she was assured that the congregation was ready for change and wanted to grow. He/she was told he/she had the full support for anything he/she wanted to try. He/she comes to a meeting to share a proposal to launch a brand new praise service and to move the traditional service from its 70-year time slot of 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 to accommodate the new service. The meeting begins with each person demanding to “have their say” first. The pastor begins, but the others interrupt along the way.

#1 – Layperson 1 – long-time member whose family helped build up the church in its early days. Many of the displaced memorial gifts came from this family. The mother played organ in the church for years, but the new pastor doesn’t like organ music and wants the instrument removed from the sanctuary. The person remembers fondly a favorite pastor from an earlier decade that made no changes and was simply the best pastor the church ever had. This person constantly holds the former pastor up as a role model, and compares the current pastor – always unfavorably. Says at least five times every meeting, “I don’t see what’s wrong with the way things are!”

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#2 – Layperson 2 – fed up with all the changes and disruptions caused by the new pastor. One of the biggest financial givers in the congregation, is attending meeting to deliver the message: “If there are any more changes, I am staying home and will withhold giving until things are returned to the way they were before.” Is ready to write district superintendent to request a change of pastor. Thinks the current pastor is incompetent. Has no interest in hearing any proposal for anything else new.

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#3 – Pastor – unaware of the anxiety and unhappiness in the congregation. Thinks he/she is doing exactly what the congregation asked/expects. Is passionate and excited about the new service; bursting with ideas for ways the church can change and improve. Dismisses disagreement or argument as people simply not understanding yet how good the ideas are.

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