

## Jim's Tool Box

### Pastors Behaving Badly

In the last two issues of Jim's Tool Box, I have focused on issues related to "Parishioners Behaving Badly" (see November and December editions of *The Capitol Area South Connection*: <http://www.capareasouthumc.org>. Click on "Newsletters". This month I want to turn my attention to "Pastors Behaving Badly."

First of all let me say that most of my colleagues in ministry over the years have worked faithfully and honorably in congregations and communities large and small. I have the utmost respect for pastors whom I have known and with whom I have worked.

However, the same foibles, challenges, and character issues that touch the rest of the population affect pastors. I write from the perspective that I know that I am not now nor have I been without fault in my ministry. There have been times that I know I used bad judgment or failed to act in a way that was for the best of the ministry or for the folks involved.

From my thirty-two years in full time ministry (including seven years as a district superintendent), I offer my thoughts on pastors behaving badly. The behaviors that I am thinking about fall into four categories that I will briefly describe in this article and in one next month. This listing is not by any means exhaustive of all inappropriate or unethical clergy behavior, but it suggests some of the issues that I have found most troublesome over the years.

One category in which some pastors behave badly is in the area of control issues. The pastor is the administrative officer in charge of the congregation. However, the pastor shares that responsibility and authority with the leadership of the congregation. Some pastors seem to be threatened by others in leadership (staff members or laypersons). The need to be "right" or the desire to direct programs without assuring that others are "on board" with a project or program can be problematic.

Sometimes the pastor's need to control works itself out through the work of the Lay Leadership Committee. According to *The Book of Discipline*, the pastor chairs the Lay Leadership Committee. The pastor should lead the committee in prayerful discernment when it comes to seeking those persons with gifts and passion for various ministry tasks and leadership roles in the congregation.

However, it is not appropriate for the pastor to use his/her role on the committee to "stack" committees with his/her supporters. This is especially problematic when it comes to the roster of the Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee (P/SPRC). According to *The Discipline*, the P/SPRC is to be representative of the congregation. It is as inappropriate for the pastor to select persons who are her/his supporters as it is for others to place persons on the committee who will intentionally work against the pastor. I always said that as pastor I never wanted my best friend in the congregation or my worst critic of the congregation on the P/SPRC.

Another significant issue is that of confidentiality. Pastors are expected to maintain confidence in information that parishioners share with them. Parishioners and others often share sensitive information with clergy. It is inappropriate for pastors to reveal this information with others either in personal conversation or in a public manner. The only exception to this is that Ohio Revised Code requires a pastor with knowledge about the abuse of adults to report such information to authorities.

What is your experience with pastors behaving badly? I would invite you to share your thoughts on clergy acting inappropriately. If you would like to comment on this article, you may do so by e-mailing me at [jwaugh@wocumc.org](mailto:jwaugh@wocumc.org). I would also invite you to post a comment on the Pastor Behaving Badly Discussion Board at <http://www.capareasouthumc.org/PBB2>. You will have to log on to offer a post. This will be a moderated discussion, so you will not see your post immediately until I have had an opportunity to review it.

Next month, I want to continue to discuss ways that pastors can behave badly. I would also like to include a capsule response from a few pastors or laypersons about this issue. You can e-mail me directly with your response at [jwaugh@wocumc.org](mailto:jwaugh@wocumc.org). Or you can post on the discussion page on the district website. Your comments will not be posted until I have approved them for publication.