

Conflict with the Pastor

Factors in conflict:

The “Pastor – Congregation fit” - Is there a shared identity, direction, theology and a creative tension in the shared vision? Lifestyle issues?

Was there an effective establishment of the relationship i.e. good bonding when the pastor arrived. This takes 9 – 18 months. Were there any events that caused lack of trust? Poor ending to previous pastor's tenure, poor transitional period, problems in settlement, illness?

Is the church functional in terms of systems, power, community and vision?

Is the pastor operating within her/his Challenge - Competency Zone?

What level are we dealing with?:

High: Public conflict, poor behaviour, pastor in burnout, depression or significant stress. Should the pastor leave? (Level 4 - 5)

Mid: Issues of leadership style, skills, bonding, role clarity, pastor-parish fit. If pastor has sense of call and excitement about ministry, willingness to learn, and if the congregation is functional – these can usually be addressed. (Level 2 - 4)

Low: Issues of personal style, appearance, lifestyle, hobbies. Leave these alone.

Steps for dealing with conflict:

Assessment: all conflicts need a careful independent assessment

Ground rules and commitments: Setup appropriate internal accountability for all involved. (Create space)

See Covenant commitments, Accountability and Leadership article

Process: Most conflicts with the pastor benefit from mobilising a relatively neutral church group to process the issues in an objective and fair way. (A few churches already have a pastor – congregation relationship group, a review group or another non-leadership group who do this, many Australian churches don't have these groups, so one may need to be set up).

Group: High trust people appointed by governing leaders/elders and the pastor.

Listens to and processes issues.

Set up fair and reasonable criteria for making recommendations to pastor, leadership and congregation.

Communicates appropriate information effectively and keeps confidential information secure.

If ad hoc, is disbanded at the completion of the process. Best to be a standing group.

Can be guided by consultants or denominational executives.

Remember:

Conflict can be creative and can highlight issues that need to be fixed.

Not everyone is going to be happy. It is OK for people to choose to leave.

Everyone has a responsibility before God to act with integrity, care, humility, kindness and gentleness – no exceptions!

God is in the midst of conflict