

Church Covenants

Templates



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Introduction



O h Behave!!!

A church's DNA includes five specific components: Mission, Values, Vision, Target, and behavior. In this workbook, I'm addressing the last genetic component: Behavior.

A church's predominant culture is determined by how the leaders and members behave. Most visitors and guests can suss out that culture within twelve to fifteen minutes of their arrival. On the other hand, long-time church members are often deluded about the culture because, like a fish in water, they're so immersed in it that it's difficult to "notice" it.

If "everyone" is warm, inviting, friendly, and caring to guests and to one another, then guests will probably experience that culture based on people's behaviors. On the other hand, it only takes one grumpy person, one Negative Ned or Nelly to spoil the congregational culture. Sadly, negativity is the cancer that is most responsible for poisoning a church's culture. The problem facing most stagnant and declining churches is that their predominant culture doesn't reflect an environment of life transformation or welcoming hospitality. Instead, their cultures reflect divisiveness, disdain, apathy, and/or negativity.

Sadly, the most difficult thing to change in any church is the predominant culture. In fact, it takes one of two things: heart change or membership change, as in, the departure of the Negative Neds and Nellys. Occasionally, Ned and Nelly will have a life transforming experience and they'll become Positive Pauls and Paulas. But sadly, more often than not, the only way a congregation's negative culture will change is through membership pruning – and few churches/church leaders have the stomach for that.

Years back, Bill Easum wrote an article on this phenomenon. I've included that article at the end of this workbook.



The most effective tools for changing a congregation's culture are Behavioral Covenants

Congregational culture is a reflection of member and leader behaviors. Modify behaviors with covenants that spell out the expectations for relationships within the church and beyond.



Example Leadership Covenant

As a Leader of First Church, being held to a higher standard ...

I WILL:

- Follow the First Church Discipleship Behaviors statement.
- Regularly attend and take part in worship.
- Regularly attend Bible study, pray, and be a member of a small group.
- Actively support and participate in the ministries of the church.
- Attend meetings as expected of my position.
- Enthusiastically support the decisions made by the leadership team.
- Encourage each other and admonish one another, when necessary, with respect and dignity.
- Exhibit healthy and faithful behaviors in my relationships, especially those of friendships and of marriage.
- Be a solid financial supporter, recognizing the biblical directive to tithe.
- Allow the Holy Spirit to fill me so I will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, faithfulness, generosity, gentleness, and self-control.
- Discover, claim, celebrate, develop, and employ the gifts God has given me.
- Be hospitable: friendly, kind, attentive, and welcoming to guests and one another.
- Be accessible to the body of Christ and intentionally seek an apprentice to mentor so that they may be equipped for the work of ministry.
- Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, so all may reach unity of the faith and knowledge of Jesus.
- If unable to keep these covenants for a season, I will resign in order that another can continue the work and ministry of the church.



be kind

Example Membership Covenant

As a Member of First Church ...

- I will treat each other with respect and compassion, speaking honestly, and taking the time to listen to one another.
- I will joyfully accept and embrace all people into our midst, practicing generosity of our time, our abilities, our financial gifts and our prayers for each other.
- I will pursue agreement through open and honest interaction and then speak well of resulting decisions by the community of First Church and its leaders to build trust in fulfilling the united mission of the congregation.
- I will practice peacemaking by following the teaching of Matthew 18:15–17.
- I will be faithful in regular worship attendance, small group Bible study and prayer, growing in spirit and grace, so that we experience the life transforming movement of God's Spirit within us.
- Leaders will model these behaviors of discipleship, being of one heart and soul, by continuing to grow in spirit and grace, inspiring others to come alongside.

On Not Being Nice

For the Sake of the Gospel

By Bill Easum



Throughout all my consulting ministry, I have seen a disturbing pattern: most established churches are held hostage by one or two bullies. Either one individual or a small group of individuals is usually very opposed to the idea of the church making any radical change, even if it means the change would give the church a chance to thrive once again. I keep hearing pastors say, "If I tried that, I'd lose my job!"

Courageous pastors often ask, "What do I do when one person intimidates the church so much that it is not willing to try something new?" My response is always, "Either convert them, neutralize them, kick them out, or kill them. The Body can not live with cancer." To which someone usually cries, "That's not very Christian!"

My response describes much of the wisdom of both the Old Testament and Jesus. Maturing Christians love so deeply that they will do anything, even if "anything" includes not being nice, for the sake of the gospel. Jesus was so compassionate toward others that he could not remain quiet when he saw people holding other people in bondage.

The Old Testament story of the wilderness wanderings contains a remarkable account of how Moses responded to a group of people who insisted on keeping the Hebrews in bondage to the past. A group of people led by Korah came to Moses, asking him to relinquish leadership because they wanted to take the Hebrews back to Egypt. Moses responded by falling on his face prostrate before God in prayer. Then he got up and slew all of them. Not very nice, but necessary if they were going to get to Canaan. Moses knew that freedom with God was better than slavery with Pharaoh. The same is true today: freedom to grow in grace is always better than enslavement to the status quo.



Almost every struggling church has at least one dysfunctional bully who goes out of his or her way to be a big fish in a small pond. That is often the primary reason the church is struggling. This person gets his or her sense of self-worth by keeping the church so intimidated, either through actions or through money, that very little can happen without that person's approval. The sad thing is most of the leaders know that this person is a stumbling block to the church's future and they will not do anything about it. Church leaders ignore the bully, thinking that is the Christian thing to do, and in so doing, they assist in the stunted growth or death of the congregation.

For example, I was working with a staff in a large church. The first day I met with the staff, the tension was so high I could have cut the air with a knife. The staff hardly said a word to one another. The next day when we met, the staff laughed and cut up together as if they were one big, happy family. As I looked around the table, the only apparent difference was that one staff person was not present. I asked the staff if they sensed the difference I was feeling. They knew exactly what I meant. Finally, one of them blurted out, "Jim is not here today. Staff meetings are always better when he's not here." It turned out that Jim was a dysfunctional bully who ran to the personnel committee every time he didn't get his way. Because of him, several competent staff members had been fired. To make matters worse, the staff knew that Jim seldom contributed anything to the health and vitality of the church.

I asked the staff if they had confronted Jim with how they felt. Their response was typical for church folks. "That would not be the Christian thing to do. It would hurt him deeply. After all, the church is all he has." Sure, it's all that he has; no one else would put up with him. Who is more dysfunctional, Jim or the staff?



A church not far from me told its bishop that it wanted a young pastor. It wasn't long before they got one. One of the first things the young pastor did was ask the board to change the appearance of the church newspaper. The board unanimously voted to do so. Four months later, I noticed the newspaper was switched back to its old form. I called the pastor to ask why. His response is a classic. "Most of the board were present the night we voted. However, one man was out of the country. When he returned to find that a decision had been made in his absence, he demanded that the chairperson immediately call another meeting. At the second meeting, the board voted unanimously to rescind their previous decision about the newspaper." When I asked why, he replied: "This man always pays off any deficit at the end of year and he wanted the vote changed. The board was afraid to buck him." The future of that church was held hostage to a bully.

I'm convinced that one of the main sins of the established church is that we have taught ourselves to be nice instead of being Christian. In spite of aspiring to be disciples of Jesus, we teach that the essence of Christianity is to be nice. Where do we get such a notion? Certainly not from the actions of Jesus.

One of the hallmarks of Jesus' ministry was his constant attack on the status quo. He challenged it every time he could. He even went out of his way to upset the religious bullies of his time. He called them white sepulchers, and by doing so, attacked the very heart of their priesthood based on purity. Jesus loved church leaders too much to allow them to remain such small persons. When Peter showed his displeasure over the impending death of his Lord, Jesus said to him, "Get behind me, Satan." Jesus loved his disciples too much to let them miss one of the more important lessons of servanthood. Jesus, the man who said, "be compassionate as God is compassionate," had no desire to be nice because being nice has nothing to do with being Christian. Being nice is often nothing more than a lack of compassion for people. Let's explore what this means.

At one point, in a holy rage, Jesus entered the Temple with a large, metal-tipped whip and drove out the money changers. As he did, he quipped, "It is written, 'My house shall be called the house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of thieves." If we discover why Jesus responded to religious bullies this way, we will also discover why so many church leaders refuse to follow his example.

When Jesus cleansed the temple he was in the Court of the Gentiles. This was the only part of the temple where Gentiles were allowed to worship. What ticked Jesus off was that the religious leaders were using the only place Gentiles could worship God as the place to sell their wares. What was to be a place of spiritual discovery and worship for the Gentiles was turned into an economic opportunity for the religious leaders. (Sound familiar?) The focus of the religious leaders was on themselves, not the spiritual vitality of the Gentiles. So he drove them out.

Therefore, thieves are those who do religious things for their own purpose. So when we are doing things that only benefit those within the church, we become a den of thieves. When we say that we want it this way because it has always been this way, we are a den of thieves. When we focus on only the needs of our members, we are robbing the community of a chance to join us in our journey of faith. Such action is intolerable for people of compassion and love.

Church leaders are robbing people of their spiritual birthright when they allow dysfunctional people to sell their petty wares in the house of God rather than proclaiming release from bondage. We really need to get clear on this problem and do something about it. If we really love people, and if we really want them to experience the love of God, then we will never allow the bully to rob others of their spiritual birthright. Anyone who knows how family





systems work knows that the worst thing one can do with dysfunctional people is give them more attention by giving in to their every whim. Instead, tough love has to be applied. The compassionate thing to do is hold them accountable for their self-centered actions. In doing so, they may begin the journey with God.

Jesus shows us what to do with people who do not want to grow spiritually. In training his disciples how to spread the word of God's love, he told the disciples to shake the dust off their feet when they encountered people who did not receive them graciously. Jesus loved people too much to let anything slow down the process of setting people free from their bondage, whatever it is.

People who would rather be nice than Christian do not love enough. They do not have enough compassion. Instead, they are afraid of hurting someone or of being hurt. Remember, fear is the opposite of love. "Perfect love casts out all fear."

If we really cared about people, we would not allow anyone to bully others into submission. Instead we would want every person to feel free enough to express their hopes and dreams, to stretch their wings, and to reach their God-given potential. If we really loved people, we would not base our decisions on whether people would like us for those decisions.

What does being nice accomplish?

- More dysfunctional people
- Fewer spiritual giants
- An intimidated congregation
- An inability to spread the gospel
- Little hope of renewal or growth

Being nice is not what Jesus wants from any of us.



One of the basic lessons I'm learning as a consultant is that before renewal begins in a church or denomination, it is normal that someone has to leave or be denied. Almost every time a dying church attempts to thrive once again, someone tries to bully the leadership out of the attempt. And almost every time, if a turnaround is to take place, such persons are lost along the way because they are no longer allowed to get their way. When they can't get their way, they leave. Not even Jesus got through the journey with all of his disciples. Why should we expect to?

This does not mean that we should set out to intimidate the bully or to kick people out of the church. It does mean that we care enough about the future of our church not to allow anyone to stifle its ability to liberate people from bondage or victimization. It means that we care enough about the bully that we will not allow the bully to intimidate the church because we know the spiritual vitality of both the bully and the church is at stake.

Matthew 18 gives us a formula for dealing with dysfunctional bullies. First, an individual privately confronts the person with what he/she is doing and asks the person to stop. If this doesn't achieve positive results, two or more people are to confront the person. If this does not resolve the matter, the person is to be brought before the entire church. Listen again to the not-so-nice words of Jesus. "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

In other words, withdraw from that person's presence, or in our case remove that person from office! Never, ever allow such a person to dictate the direction of the church.

The next time someone in your church attempts to intimidate or bully the church out of taking a positive step forward, go to God in prayer, and then get out the metal-tipped whip and drive that person out of the church ... of course in love.

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