

Five Relationships Every Minister Needs to Develop

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Navigating in the fog of conflict without guidance from trusted friends and professionals is a flight plan destined for a crash. Five support system components are essential if the minister/minister's spouse is to emerge from the fog of conflict without sustaining crippling wounds. The supporting cast includes (1) a **feedback group** of two or three trusted friends from within the congregation who will be brutally honest in providing feedback, (2) a formal **ministers support group**, (3) a **therapist**, (4) an **attorney** and (5) **friends outside the church/organization** where one serves as minister.

The minister cannot get complete and accurate information by himself or herself. Some people have a tendency to respond according to what they think the minister wants to hear. Many people have already become cut off from the minister through triangulation. Others simply withdraw because they cannot deal with conflict.

There are usually a few individuals within the congregation with whom most all factions talk. If the minister can meet periodically (and usually individually) with some of these trusted persons on an informal basis as a **feedback group**, he or she can gain valuable information. The minister must, however, be willing to listen to what they say without reacting to them or arguing with them. They can provide a fairly good picture of what is happening and why. When they caution the minister concerning his or her ministry style or direction, the minister should listen carefully. After all, the minister selected these people because of their support and trustworthiness.

A formal **ministers support group** can be a valuable asset to a minister at any time whether or not there are any crises. Tunnel vision becomes the norm when under severe pressure; so do feelings of isolation and inadequacy, denial, lack of trust, withdrawal, and a desire to run. A ministers support group can address many of these issues with a participant in a safe setting.

Some of the benefits of a formal ministers support group include:

- Helps develop deep fellowship
- Helps develop a sense of "belonging:
- Helps participants gain different perspectives
- Enhances leadership confidence
- Helps persons get in touch with their feelings
- Provides affirmation and confrontation in a healthy way
- Helps reduce the competition among ministers
- Encourages longer tenures

A minister who was under heavy attack by some of the leaders within the congregation he served as pastor confessed to his ministers support group that he no longer trusted his judgment or ability to lead. The support group members asked him to covenant with them that he would make no major decisions, including resigning, without first discussing it with them. By

bouncing his ideas off the group, he was able to better process his thoughts and better see the far-reaching implications of various actions – including the perception of his actions. The group was able to affirm him as a person and as a minister. They were also able to confront some of his shortsighted plans as well as his denial tendencies. Later, the minister credited the ministers support group with his survival of the attempted forced resignation.

The role of the *therapist* is to deal with the minister's emotional and mental health – both as a precaution and for processing feelings. The therapist can also monitor the minister's depression level and prescribe medication if needed or refer to someone who can assess the medical need. This may prevent or at least control clinical depression and considerable heartache later. Learning to handle anger maturely is a significant aspect of a healthy life.

An *attorney* is a vital member of the support system. Attorneys have more training and experience in dispute resolution than most other professions. Attorneys are also one of the most self-differentiated professions in society. The attorney's role in the support system is to coach the minister – usually from the background. The attorney is the minister's advocate and should be engaged early in the process for the minister's protection from illegal acts and to prevent the minister from libeling himself or herself. The attorney's advocacy helps to level the playing field and helps remove from the minister the sense of urgency to make hasty decisions that might later be regretted. Sometimes, just slowing down the process is a major accomplishment that benefits all parties.

Since the ministers support group does not include spouses, *friends outside the church or organization* where one serves as minister provides a setting where both the minister and spouse can talk, share their feelings, and process what is happening to them. Without these friends, the spouse does not have a group with whom to share. Though ministers and spouses can have friends inside the church/organization, it is not wise to “air your pain” to them. Friends with whom to share should be chosen carefully – people whom you trust, who love you, and who can guard confidentiality.

There are other components that could be added to this list, such as, a personal trainer a spiritual director, and a life coach.. However, the five listed above are essential for maintaining good mental, emotional and spiritual health. There are no fees involved with three of the five components. Only therapists and attorneys involve fees. Your ministry will be no more effective than your emotional, mental and spiritual health.