RULES THAT KEEP CONGREGATIONS UNHEALTHY

A colleague shared with me her experience after speaking at a semiannual meeting of the women's organizations of about a dozen affiliated congregations. After her address most of the women headed out of the sanctuary toward the hospitality room for a luncheon. One participant, whom the speaker judged to be a woman in her late 70's or early 80's, lingered. As the speaker retrieved her presentation materials, this elder member of the host congregation came up to her and in a hushed voice whispered,

"Thank you for saying that."

"Saying what?" inquired the speaker.

"For mentioning in your presentation that you are not Norwegian," replied the hushed voice.

"Well, it is true," responded the speaker with a tone of self-confidence. "I am not Norwegian at all."

The woman, rather wide eyed, looked from side to side obviously surveying to see if any others were listening. Then, leaning in closer to the speaker, spoke even softer, "I am not either. My husband, who has been dead for almost twenty years, was Norwegian. I am not." Then a short dramatic pause, a shifting glance of the eyes around the room, and with an even more seriously hushed voice, "But they all think I am."

Most people, hearing this true story, chuckle. Yet, how sad. How sad that a woman, long standing member of the congregation, lives in the fear of being rejected if people find out that she does not share their ethnic origins. How sad

for anyone to have to depend on marriage for acceptance into an expression of the family of God. This congregation replaced building relationships based on understanding, appreciating differences, and respect, with ethnic assumptions. They live in a survival mode and are governed by unhealthy expectations codified into rules protecting their way of being, unhealthy as it is.

There is no intentionality to keep congregations in a survival mode. Lay and clergy leaders do not make plans to engage the congregation in ways that reinforce behaviors inhibiting greater wholeness. Members have no desire to have their community of faith be less healthy. Yet, many may be unconsciously participating in practices that greatly impair the purpose and vitality of the congregation. In this chapter consideration will be given to ways in which rules and expectations, necessary aspects of life together, can take on unwholesome dimensions which result in deleterious effects on congregational health and its expressions of purpose. At the heart of this dilemma are rules that keep the congregation unhealthy.

It is not okay to talk about problems.

"It is not okay to talk about problems." This first rule is the "don't talk" rule. This rule guides the leadership in many congregations. Living by this rule, leadership can't imagine raising the issue of the organist who has been faithful for thirty-five years but is now a few beats behind. The board may decide not to tell the congregation just how desperate the financial picture appears because they don't

want to upset people. In reviewing the annual report, the pastoral candidate sees a financially solvent congregation because there is no mention of the $20,000 borrowed (illegally and jeopardizing the congregation's 501C3 nonprofit status) from the designated memorial fund to cover general expenses over the past two years. No one dares to ask whether there is something unhealthy about the congregation, creating a revolving door for clergy or for members. It is not okay to talk about problems because, "No, we don't have any problems here. In fact, we are doing better than most congregations."

The denial of problems, the fear that talking about an issue might make it real, creates a numbness that infiltrates the entire congregation. If congregations do not learn how to talk about small problems openly and honestly, they we be ill equipped to face major challenges. If clergy are warned, "Don't bring that up. It's in the past. Leave it be," the congregation has years of experience following this rule to keep it unhealthy. When people can't be honest about the full range of challenges facing the congregation, in short order, the congregation will be afraid to celebrate the joys, the accomplishments, the Good News. They will just hold on and try to survive.

Feelings should not be expressed openly.

Subby and Friel identify some devastating consequences of following this second rule: "Feelings should not be expressed openly." Some may come to believe it is better to deny how one is feeling than risk sharing feelings with someone else.

Living by this fear, and in denial of feelings, will create a situation wherein the people no longer are able to identify their own feeling.[1] This rule works to disconnect the head and the heart. We don't talk about what is going on inside of us. We don't allow others to really know us.

This rule receives validation from people's experiences. Many have had their feelings judged and have made judgments which they try to disguise as feelings. It is easier to make a judgment rather than to listen and inquire further. A child may say, "I am sad." The parent may respond with a judgment of the feeling, "You don't have any reason to be sad. Just cheer up." The member may say, "I am worried about the financial picture of the church." Another member, or pastor, may judge the feeling, "How can you feel that way. You shouldn't worry, you just need to trust God more." Instead of any validation for their feelings, both the child and the member experience, through the judgments of others, a sense of shame for not measuring up. When feelings are not accepted, the person learns they themselves are not acceptable.

Far too many people make judgments when they think they are sharing feelings. They do not know the difference between a feeling and a judgment. Just because one says, "I feel…" does not mean a feeling is being shared. If you can substitute "I am" for "I feel" then you have a feeling. I am hungry. I feel hungry. I am sad, concerned, angry, happy, or afraid. I feel sad, concerned, etc. Feelings disclose what is going on within us. That should never be up for debate or judgment

by another. If you say I am hungry or am concerned, others should not be debating or dismissing what physiologically or emotionally is going on inside of you.

On the other hand, if in a sentence you can substitute "I think" or "I judge" for "I feel" and it continues to sound grammatically correct, then you have a judgment, not a feeling. "I feel (I think) the congregation should not buy the adjacent property," is a judgment, not a feeling. "I feel anxious about the congregation's financial condition..." is a feeling leading to the judgment, "...and I think now is not the right time to buy the property." When the verb "feel" is followed by the word "that" as in "I feel that…" a judgment is being made cloaked in feeling language. So, in hearing "I feel that you…" know a judgment is flying your way and you might want to duck. Judgments build walls between us. Sharing our feelings and having them accepted as feelings removes blocks from the walls that separate us.

When people run out of church with little or no socializing chances are they are working hard not to break these first two rules. Culturally we have become very adept at avoiding, minimizing, and diminishing these rules. "Hey, how's it goin?" "Great!"

Communication is best if indirect (triangulated).

The third rule is: "Communication is best if indirect" (triangulated). Maybe it is our insecurity. Perhaps it is in someway wrapped up in our human nature. We, too frequently, find it easier to talk *about* another person, rather than to talk *to* the person. The Eighth Commandment is not in our hearts when our lips are consumed

with, “Pastor, would you tell the organist we didn’t like the way he played the closing hymn,” or, “What makes her think she can be an assisting minister?” We all become arm chair quarterbacks, backseat drivers, critics, skeptics and gossips wanting to vote two thumbs up or down. If something has to be said, this unhealthy rule dictates it will be communicated through an unsigned missive or a second party sworn to secrecy. “Messages get mixed or confused, feelings get misdirected, and innocent people become victims of others’ inability to confront personal problems directly.”[2] This all works to keep the congregation unhealthy.

Another consequence of this unhealthy rule supporting indirect communication is the anonymous note. Many leaders claim they do not read them. Some announce their position to the congregation. I wonder how often that practice doesn’t have an opposite than desired affect? The unsigned letter seems to indicate the author is insecure or afraid. The leader assumes the fear is of them. A second look might be helpful. If the author is fearful, it may be the fear is of being rebuffed, perhaps by other members, as well as by the clergy. There may have been a personal hurt or betrayal of trust experienced by the person with members of the congregation, a previous leader, or authority figure. At minimum it indicates the author does not trust self, the congregation, or the leader enough to fully entrust his or herself to that leader. It may simply be the author learned this rule along with the two previous rules in his or her family origin and has not experienced any alternative expectations for a differing behavior in the congregation.

The anonymous letter or triangulated concern through a governing board member could be a result of the pastor having given off signals that s/he is defensive and will not to listen to any criticism. That slippery slope of not listening to criticism can lead to tuning out suggestions, to turning a deaf ear to ideas. Many members, on the other hand, too frequently don't have a relationship with the pastor to know whether she or he will listen or not. They function by this unhealthy rule, which has been in place for years.

Judicatory leaders reinforce the efficacy of this unhealthy rule as they attempt to intervene when there is unrest. In such cases they will meet with the governing board listening to the concerns of unhappy or offended members and separately may listen to the clergy's side. Too seldom do they bring the two together. If, and when, they do, ground rules need to be set and respected. Coaching would also assist people to speak in none hostile language and tones so the other can hear the concern rather than react to the emotions behind the words. Unfortunately, anxious judicatory leaders have removed clergy without ever getting a full picture including the patterns of behavior supported by unhealthy rules that have been governing the congregation for years.

The cloak of confidentiality is often used to justify supporting this unhealthy rule. How does it help a pastor when at a meeting of the governing board, or with the judicatory staff, a leader says, "Pastor we have had a complaint from a member about you," and when the pastor inquires who has that concern the response is, "We can't tell you. We told the person her/his name would be held confidential" even as

all twelve members of the board, or judicatory staff, already know? We triangulate our communication and then attempt to justify our secrecy by claiming all cannot be revealed because it is confidential. Leadership of judicatories and congregations, lay and clergy would help the congregation move toward health by simply clarifying the difference between secrecy and confidentiality. Likewise, clergy confuse the two especially as they are defensive and being challenged to justify their time to a distrustful or over-functioning board.

Unrealistic expectations - be strong, good, right, perfect. Make us proud.

"Unrealistic expectations - be strong, good, right, perfect. Make us proud," is the fourth rule that keeps congregations unhealthy. The rule is based on a fear of failure and that those who fail will be excluded or judged guilty of doing some harm to the whole congregation. In the spirit of this rule, some try to control others by verbalizing unhealthy expectations. Expectations are used as a baseline to judge others and to place blame. Too often when one person does not meet another's expectations, that person is berated, criticized, demeaned, or diminished. This includes not being accepted because of racial, ethnic or religious background. This seems to stem from an irrational fear of failure and over compensation of needing to be right. Quite the opposite, human life is such that more is learned from failure than from accomplishments. From ancient Chinese wisdom, the *Book of Changes,* the *I Ching* comes this challenging thought, "It's not the event that is so important, it is the response to the event that is everything."[3] If the goal is to be good, right

and perfect, the response will be criticism, and judgment. If the goal is to be truly human, the response can be love and grace.

Don't Be Selfish!

The fifth rule is: "Don't Be Selfish!" The rule refers to allocations of time, attention and money. Living under this idealistic rule instills a sense that another's needs are more important and should be addressed before one's own. Therefore, one tries to feel good, not simply by helping others, but by putting the other's needs first. The more the focus is on caring for another, the greater the failure to provide for one's own needs or to develop one's own gifts and abilities. Anger, shame, and loss of self-respect are the result. Emotional burnout can be a consequence. When we respect ourselves enough to address our needs, we are more apt to be present to help others satisfy their needs. Some people end up with no self-identity apart from being the co-dependent helper.

Church of The Wounded Healer was a mission congregation. Five years into his ministry the pastor's wife began to exhibit emotional illness with physical consequences. The congregation, not only stepped up and offered her care, even more they cared for the pastor. They excused him for missed deadlines and appointments. They learned not to expect much from preaching or pastoral care. Their care-taking included the giving of a substantial financial gift to the pastor. Over the next twelve years the pastor's wife continued her decline of health. The congregation continued in its role as caregiver. The pastor eventually moved on, and

the congregation called their next pastor. Healthy, with a young growing family, this pastor did not need their caregiving. His focus was on the congregation engaging in its mission in the world. The congregation responded with anger, criticism, and the blaming of the new pastor.

In congregations this don't-be-selfish rule more often comes out directed at the spending of money. "We don't need a new roof. We can't afford it." "The gathering space doesn't need to be painted. The custodian should just give the walls a good cleaning." "Those bathrooms are fine. The first building on this site was built in the 1890's. We didn't have indoor plumbing here until the late 1950's." "We can't go to the congregation with a pledge drive. Some people got upset and left the church when we did that twenty-five years ago." Proponents of this rule are usually the co-dependents who are protecting the ones that they have placed ahead of themselves. Adherence to this rule can keep congregations from maintaining and updating their facilities, engaging in needed programming and outreach, or justly compensating the pastor and staff.

Observing this rule, as well as the other seven rules, serves to inhibit members in their personal lives from taking care of themselves in a way that would bolster their self-image and confidence.

Do as I say, not as I do.

The sixth rule, "Do as I say, not as I do," teaches people not to trust. It causes confusion. If I trust the leader, then I will trust what is told to me and try to follow

through on what is asked of me. But, if the leader says one thing and does another, trust is not developed. How can one trust the words when the actions do not match? Angeles Arrien in her book *The Four Fold Way*, points out that when there is not an alignment between what one says and what one does, then there is a loss of power and effectiveness.[4] When we do what we say and say what me mean, we build trust and develop power and respect. Our actions as a congregation must match our words. We say, "Jesus loves us," "We are forgiven," "All are welcome," but how do we act? Is there an alignment between our words and our actions? Judgmental or superior attitudes, possessiveness of one's pew, prejudice, all point to our message of God's love becoming meaningless to our children and to others. Children who grow up with this rule come to believe they are not good enough and don't deserve to be loved.[5] The result is generations of people still trying to earn God's love. Adherence to this rule, more than any other, may be preventing members from trusting the words of grace, forgiveness and hope they hear in sermons.

It is not okay to have fun and be playful

Rule number seven which serves to maintain unhealthy relationships is, "It is not okay to have fun and be playful." Life is serious. Church is serious. This rule grows out of poor self-esteem and under-developed self-identity. Because people who live by these rules judge themselves harshly, they judge they don't deserve to play and laugh and enjoy life, which has not yet been earned. The more the congregation resists laughing and being playful, the longer it suffers and the more it imposes

suffering on others. Laughing and crying, exhibiting those emotional responses to feelings is healing for the body, mind and soul. It is healthy and healing for the body gathered, the congregation.

Don't Rock the Boat

Many people beaten by the constant changes and challenges of life, have heightened insecurities. They want a safe place. More than just a place "Where Everybody Knows Your Name," (Theme song of the 1980s television sitcom Cheers), they want a place wherein they can trust their insecurities will not be exposed. They want a place that will be constant, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. They know God to be the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end and constant in-between. Their expectation is that God's church should therefore be without change, steady, constant, absent of rocking.

"Don't Rock the Boat" is the rule that undergirds the other seven rules. "Teacher," one might ask, "What is the greatest commandment?" Without waiting for the response, the Pharisee among us, the one trying to build security based on keeping all the rules, might answer, "Don't Rock the Boat. This is the greatest of the (unhealthy) rules. On it all the others depend."

This rule is so powerful because it tells us to keep the other rules without question; keep things as they are. In congregations the rule is most often expressed as, "We've never done it that way before." (Also known as the seven last words - of the Church.) This mantra is often incanted as an attempt to ward off change.

Change is often seen as a necessary evil and should be avoided at all cost. But, wait! All living things change. That is God's design for all of creation. My daughter who worked on Mars projects at NASA studying rocks tells me even old fossils change. I found hope in that reality. Fear of change, fear of someone rocking the boat, is unhealthy as it focuses on the fear of loss of control. This rule would have us believe it is not okay to grow and change. The rule is designed to keep members in a posture of choosing to stay in the known state of illness rather than accepting the risk of moving toward healing and a greater wholeness. This rule would have us choose fear over hope. It is the rule of the insecure trying to maintain their sense of power and/or control. To what degree are they playing god and how much do they really trust God?

That the boat should not rock is a faulty expectation. Boats are designed to rock, to move with the waves. During hurricanes ships are moved away from moorings, out to sea, to ride out the storm. Buildings in earthquake prone areas are designed to give and sway with the movement of the earth. Bridges and roadways are built with expansion joints to compensate for reactions of materials due to fluctuations in temperatures and movements of the earth. Why do we use Lycra and spandex, and what about human skin?

This rule often wears the disguise of - Tradition. Expounding on Isaiah 29:13, Jesus declares to the Pharisees, who have challenged him because his disciples were not following the traditions of the elders, "You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." A tradition has both form and function; the form is

the *way* we do something, the function is the *why* of doing it, the purpose, the meaning. Abandoning the commandment means we have lost the meaning and purpose of what we are doing, the function, and we hold to the ritual observance, "the way we have always done it," the form, human tradition.

In the Seder we celebrate the deliverance of the children of God from bondage and slavery; that is the function. The Seder can take on various forms. In one, participants look back to Moses leading the people out of Egypt. In another, the form is around the remembering of the deliverance of the survivors from the holocaust. For some, where the Seder is about the traditions of food and family, it appears the function, reminding us of God's deliverance, has been replaced with a tradition of focusing on what this family has always done.

In a similar way, there is a real danger of the function, the meaning and purpose, getting lost when focused distractions arise over the form of Holy Communion: kneeling or standing at the altar, or by station, or receiving sitting in the pew; whole loaf, unleavened loaf, wafers; wine or grape juice; intinction, common-cup, or individual glasses, not to mention the frequency options, the meaning, the function. Empty traditions are those rituals we perform out of a sense of duty, group participation, or fear, without having an understanding of the deeper meaning and purpose that the physical aspects were originally initiated to support and convey.

In serving a small congregation in a metropolitan area, Pastor Klaffen heard that the Sunday School teachers were frustrated. Inquiring further, she learned

that the issue was the inconsistency of students. Most of them attended only every other week. As the Sunday School teachers spoke, it became clear that the present reality was challenging their sense of tradition at the congregation. Sunday School Classes had always been offered here every Sunday, September through May. Pastor Klaffen learned that the main cause of the absenteeism was the high number of students being with the other parent every other weekend. She suggested that the primary purpose of Sunday school was to help the children learn about God's love for them. The teachers agreed. She then suggested that class by grade every week was an ideal they sought but was not as important as learning God's love. Again they agreed. Pastor Klaffen made the following offer, "I will contact all of the parents who bring their children to Sunday school splitting weekend parenting time with another parent. I will ask them if they could arrange with the other parent a schedule whereby the children could attend Sunday school on the first and third Sunday of the month. The other Sundays we will have a multigenerational learning day." Parents and teachers agreed and starting the next September it was initiated. Pastor Klaffen reported, "It was amazing to see how the children would attend regularly on the first and third Sundays. The teachers were pleased they could again plan lessons knowing the students would be there. It was even more amazing to see the commitment of the parents for as a fifth Sunday would come or a holiday, it didn't take long and they were back on schedule." By understanding both the form (the structure) and the function (the primary purpose) all were able to focus on what was most important. This gave them the ability to be

flexible with the form of Sunday School in order to further the primary purpose, it function.

Rigid and inflexible postures generally are not helpful for life. In a congregation when everything is placid, there is no challenge, no growth, no mission or serving. When everything is calm, we learn nothing new about ourselves, others, or God. When the boat of our life, of our congregation, is being rocked, maybe instead of overreacting with negativity and frantic responses, a better posture might be to roll with the waves and trust God. Instead of being reactionary because the routine of worship is changed, maybe God is trying to get our attention. When the congregation is confronted with something new, uncomfortable, challenging, it might be the better part of wisdom, and humility, to ask, "What would God have me learn from this experience?" In reality the congregation, living by this rule, cannot consider such a question. The rule serves to keep at bay any options that would open up the world of possibilities. New hopes, dreams, or ideas threaten the stability and illusionary security of the system. When the boat starts rocking, it reveals just how vulnerable the system is. It discloses the insecurity. Yet, as members rock with the storm, discovering they have not perished, they gain the opportunity to deepen their trust, in their abilities, and especially their trust in God.

Replacing the Unhealthy Rules

The temptation would be to merely break these rules, which keep the congregation unhealthy. However, to simply break them will cause more anxiety and may be counter productive. If the leadership wants the congregation to be healthy, to move out of the survival mode, then the unhealthy rules will need to be replaced. This will not be easy. Be mindful, many congregations have these rules in place, in part, because many of the members are comfortable with, and have experience maintaining, these rules from their families of origin. They grew up under the guidance of these rules, passing on to the next generation what they have received. Co-dependency is a condition which can emerge from any family system (this includes the congregation as family) where the unwritten, even unspoken, eight rules exist.[6]

There will be resistance, but the unhealthy rules can be replaced. This will have to begin with an honest evaluation by pastors of the rules by which they live. Many clergy unconsciously support the congregation living by the unhealthy rules because the clergy themselves have also grown up with these rules and continue to be guided by them. Clergy will need to confront their adherence to the unhealthy rules before they see them as problematic in the congregation. Something about the log in one's own eye.

The key is to model a new way of being. Since these unhealthy rules are not written down, but identified through observing repeated and consistent behavior, the replacement has to be an equally consistent behavior which is practiced and reinforced. Lay the groundwork. Bible studies and sermons are opportunities to

consider how many times Jesus modeled a way of being contrary to the unhealthy rules — the rules that, as they were applied, interfered with caring and nurturing human relationships. Healing on the Sabbath, the woman at the well, another healing on the Sabbath, the disciples in the grain field, touching the unclean, the foreigners, the children, more healing on the Sabbath, each points to Jesus who did not merely break the rules, but modeled a grace-filled loving response. Jesus was not about breaking the rules for the sake of being contrary or to instigate crucifixion. He broke unhealthy rules by following ideals of a higher authority and modeling behavior which was healthier and affirming to the dignity of all — love over fear, grace over judgment, hospitality over exclusion, freedom over manipulation, truth over abusive power.

Consider the eight rules and determine which one is the weakest. Which rule will produce the least resistance and generate the least amount of anxiety when it is replaced? That is the starting point for you and your congregation. Rule seven, "It is not okay to have fun and be playful," generally appears to be the weakest one for most congregations. The enjoyment of relationships, especially with children, invites lightheartedness, playfulness. Slowly build on this with other members in various situations. In time, identify the next weakest rule and begin to intentionally replace it with behaviors to build up, affirming and instilling confidence.

As each rule is being replaced, it is helpful if a behavior or activity is in alignment with a value or spiritual posture of the congregation. For example, some congregational personalities have a spirituality that needs to know, and be

reminded, God is in charge. This could be a weighty topic, or with a playful relationship with children, it can be reinforced in a more lighthearted way during children's sermon time as the children are invited to express their trust in God. A basic spiritual posture is asserted while an unhealthy rule is *gently* being replaced.

UNSPOKEN EXPECTATIONS - THE SILENT KILLER

Expectations are projections of anticipation we cast onto a future encounter with a person, activity, or object. Expectations develop through various forms of life experiences. These projections are further shaped by one's own abilities and preferences. Expectations, in effect, are an attempt to limit the possibilities of a future experience to conform to a desired outcome. They are filtered through value judgments which anticipate the encounter will be positive or negative, good or bad, right or wrong, static or changing, new or old, traditional or contemporary, etc., etc., etc. Expectations are grounded in one's own personality. They tend to be shaped by the preferences, values, experiences, and desired interactions of the personality.

A person sees trailers on the television for a particular movie. Going online, the person reads a synopsis. The person recalls having had experienced other works by the lead performer in the film. A friend tells the person it is a great movie. There is more anticipation to see it as plans are made with a family member or friend. Through these pre-encounters with information about the movie and supported by judgments formed in past experiences, expectations are developed. After the movie,

a colleague may ask, “Was it a good movie?” The first response might very well be, “It wasn’t what I expected.”

The answer, shaped by expectations, does not answer the other person’s question about the nature and quality of the movie. Expectations can heighten the anticipation or the concern. They can lead to a greater engagement or to more caution. Expectations have power. Expectations are pre-judgments that have the power to limit and reframe an experience. One’s expectations are often egocentric.

Expressing expectations is an essential element of communication in maintaining healthy relationships. Unspoken expectations, however, are a “silent killer” to any relationship. As one uses his/her expectations, especially unspoken expectations, to judge another and that person does not measure up, a block is placed in the emotional wall between them by the one holding the expectations. The recipient of the judgment does not fully understand the judgment; it remains silent. The presence of the wall, of the block to being accepted, is sensed and causes confusion. Often the one who has been judged by unspoken expectations senses they don’t measure up, but it is unclear to whom, how, why, or on what basis. As these emotional walls are silently built, it becomes exceedingly difficult to establish and maintain trust. Trust is essential in relationship, especially in congregational life.

Pastor Mark was called to serve a larger mid-sized congregation. The documents from the congregation outlined his responsibilities, along with many of the expectations. In their paper work, as well as in interviews with candidates, the search committee indicated they were looking for a pastor who could help them

move into the 21st century; they desired a pastor who had vision. Pastor Mark was a visionary; he saw the big picture. He was able to set in motion the development of one of the congregation's primary goals — the offering of a "Praise Worship Service" as an alternative to the two Sunday morning traditional services.

Pastor Mark, however, left within a couple short years because of conflict. Yes, there were worship wars, but they were not the reason for his departure. He anticipated the starting of a new style of worship would not go as smoothly as some members of the search committee had envisioned. No, the discontent that drove Pastor Mark to seek another church to serve had nothing directly to do with worship.

Conflict escalated and the judicatory leader was called to mediate. As this first meeting progressed, it was clear there was no comprehensibly defined issue. Admittedly Pastor Mark functioned according to his contract, and he was a match for what the congregation had said it needed in a pastor, and yet, there was great dissatisfaction and unrest. Finally, one brave soul, who in his youth had probably recognized the emperor had no clothes, piped up, "Pastor Mark doesn't really like us and is not interested in us. He doesn't even know our names." Many heads bowed and nodded. By the time the true source of this conflict was revealed, it was too late.

The primary catalyst for this conflict was judgments made about Pastor Mark's commitment to the congregation based on unspoken expectations. Being the visionary, he struggles with some of the mundane details, like people's names. It was difficult for him to remember the names of the parishioners. Pastor Mark

admitted his challenge. He had had name tags printed and displayed in the gathering space. He publicly invited, encouraged, and even begged people to wear them on Sunday mornings. Most congregational members refused to wear them. "We know each other," they said. By the time of this meeting with the judicatory leader many of the members had already judged Pastor Mark as not really caring about them and judged that he should go. Their judgments were made based on the unfulfilled, unspoken expectations and any chance of creating a relationship was sabotaged.

The unspoken expectations became the silent killer. The expectation that a new pastor would easily know all the members by name was so obvious to every member of the search committee it was never a point of discussion with any candidate. This expectation for the pastor knowing all their names was based on their experience with their previous pastor at the end of his fifteen years of ministry with them. The faulty perspective of condensed time supported the unrealistic expectation of Pastor Mark that his behaviors and abilities should be a continuance of their experience with the previous pastor. The silent expectation was further flawed with the assumption by the members that they should have no part in assisting Pastor Mark meet their expectations of learning their names.

Personality preferences, individual and corporate, can lead to unconscious assumptions that others share the same view, values, priorities, etc. The abilities, or failings, of one pastor can easily be built into the unspoken expectations of the congregation concerning the next pastor. A pastor shared the following personal

experience. He was just beginning his second year when three senior members of the congregation made an appointment. Upon entering his office, the "leader" announced they were there because they all agreed they did not like the way he conducted communion.

He was calm and asked them to explain their concern.

The first said, "We expect communion to be at the communion railing with everyone kneeling. That's the way we have always done it."

The second turned to the first and replied, "Well, since my knees have gotten so bad, I like that we can have the option to stand. What I don't like is the use of real bread. Crumbs fall on the floor. I expect a wafer at communion."

The third objected, "Oh, I like the bread. But, I don't think children should be taking communion. Don't we expect people to be confirmed before they take communion?"

The three had formed a united front based on the judgment the pastor does not conduct communion in the proper way. However, they had failed to really talk about the differing expectations fueling their common judgment: the pastor doesn't measure up to our expectations. In seeking to build alliances for adversarial purposes, people often fail to test whether they are standing on common ground. That being the case, how much more important it is to expose the expectations so a congregation can move forward in building healthy relationships and common support for its programs and ministries.

Clergy are equally guilty of making judgments based on their unspoken expectations about serving as pastor of a congregation. Harboring unspoken expectations will diminish a pastor's ability and willingness to work at developing a healthy relationship grounded in mutuality. Therefore, it is important for leadership, lay and clergy, to create regular opportunities to verbalize and clarify expectations. Through dialogue, expectations will be tested. Those who hold a particular expectation will learn to what extent it is commonly held. This may help prevent some from making foolish judgments based on faulty assumptions. Bringing the expectations into the light of conversation allows leaders to consider each expectation and how it would support the spiritual posture and life of the congregation or would diminish the congregation's health and vitality.

Endnotes

1. Subby, Robert and Friel, John, *Co-Dependency: A paradoxical dependency', in Co- Dependency: An Emerging Issue*, (Health Communications, Florida, 1984) p. 37.
2. Ibid. p. 38.
3. Angeles Arrien, *The Four-Fold Way*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 18, 19.
4. Ibid., p. 16.
5. Subby and Friel, p. 40.
6. Ibid., p. 31.