

### Part 1- Church Politics

I was talking with a Pastor friend recently about “vision casting“. I shared with him my experience with this subject at my last church. Perhaps it might be helpful to some if I, for the first time, wrote publicly about my final last Pastorate which officially ended almost 4½ years ago. We are thankful for the opportunity to minister there and the many blessing that came out of that for a number of people, including my wife and me. It was also a very painful time for me from which I have yet to fully heal. I realize others may have a different perspective on what happened there; but this is what I remember and understand about some key issues. I believe it can be very helpful for others to read (lessons to be learned) and I write it for that reason. Part of me does not want to write this Series, but if doing this can benefit other Pastors and churches and prevent them from derailing, it will be worthwhile. We made good friends there and we miss them. I pray daily for many of them. We are still friends. When criticism of me mounted, after maybe 3 years of growth and progress, it led to a congregational meeting and vote of confidence or no confidence. My wife and I had poured our heart and soul into the ministry and worked at it more than full-time. We really cared for the people. I thought our bonds with the members were tight. They were, with most, and the vote was favorable with the majority wanting us to remain on. I stress that the majority supported us and many of them were very upset with me when I resigned. They did not understand why. What went wrong?

Here is an important fact. Most folks in churches are not a part of the inner circle and do not know what goes on behind closed doors. They attend Services and are not aware of personal issues behind the scenes. This not only leads to confusion, but also to unfair, untrue rumors after trouble starts to surface. I did not attack my critics or seek to defend myself. I thought that would be unworthy and counter productive. Defending myself also would have required exposing what had been private and confidential. All this meant that most folks did not hear my side of the circulating stories.

Another important fact, even in a congregational church, majority votes do not necessarily carry weight. Church meetings can be a sham or a façade covering up many issues. In other words, such meetings can be misleading because many attending and voting are misinformed or are misled by leaders who are dishonest about personal motives and “agenda“. Members are hoodwinked. The real decisions are made at home or over the phone or in the hallway before or after the meeting. Of course this is the way it is with all politics, but churches are supposed to be different. In my experience, they are not and I have been a full or part-time Pastor for 45 years.

Another important fact is that it is “people of influence“ who carry the real weight. Many members are very naïve about this reality. “People of influence“ may or may not be elected Leaders. Often they are not. They are often long time members who have seen Pastors come and go and who believe they own the church (or at the very least, they are responsible for it). Often it is one or two families plus the folks who are in their circle and under their influence. They may have dominant or domineering (and stubborn) personalities, although they may say very little in a church meeting and appear humble in public. They are usually the major financial

## **NEW SERIES: A Pastorate Derailed- lessons learned**

Written by Calvin Fox

Tuesday, 13 January 2009 11:48 - Last Updated Tuesday, 13 January 2009 12:08

---

contributors which adds to their sense of entitlement. It makes no difference what the majority may want. It makes no difference what the Lord may want. It is not about small town provincialism. It is not about being conservative or traditional. It is all about power and control. Things are fine and permissible (including new members) until the people of influence feel that their power and control are threatened. Then a line is crossed and a wall erected.

Cast all the visions you want, if the “people of influence” do not buy into it, even though the majority do, the vision has no traction and will die aborning. Of course, none of these inner, personal machinations and power plays will be made public. (Actually, some of the people of influence may not even be consciously aware of what they are doing and offended to hear any of this). There will be rationalizations (or excuses) manufactured for the consumption of the majority that will be used to shoot the vision down. It makes no difference here whether the vision was good or bad, of the Lord or not. I am simply trying to clarify the dynamics of church politics. For any vision to work it must be one the people of influence will own. It is crucial to explore, communicate and agree on that from the beginning of a Pastorate. We did not. We all proceeded on unwarranted or unrealistic assumptions as to where we were going as a church. We had visions but they were not the same.

Reader, beware. What I am writing about, I am sad and dismayed to say, I have seen or heard about in many other congregations. It could be said about them, as well as the one I have in mind. Next: Part 2- the Importance of Relationships. I underestimated them.