

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
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The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflictive World

Acts 6:1-7

When a church grows, it isn't always a smooth transition. Furthermore, anytime a church does acts of charity, it doesn't always happen without hangups. Frankly stated, as long as sinful and struggling humans are trying to serve other sinful and struggling humans, mistakes and failures will happen. For example, if a church tries to bless people with a Christmas Gift Basket, conflict will often break out due to not enough volunteers, or too many volunteers, or not enough baskets, or too many baskets, or some family in need will be overlooked, etc. That is to say; grumbling in the church is a by-product of sinful and struggling humans working with other sinful and struggling humans to muddle through life.

But is this grumbling healthy? Keep in mind that the grumbling in Acts 6:1 was due to a very legitimate problem – widows were being neglected regarding the daily distribution of food. And so, grumbling is often due to legitimate failures, mistakes, and problems that need to be addressed in a church.

However, when grumbling happens, it is typically uncharitable and does not aid itself towards a solution. In other words, the grumbling – as seen in Acts 6 – was quiet enough that it kept anonymity; however, the grumbling was loud enough to be heard and felt by the disciples. And so, when there are obvious problems in the church, Christian maturity does not bend itself toward uncharitable grumbling but works to either fix the problem, address others who can fix the problem, or uphold the 8th Commandment and put the best construction on the problem. And those in leadership? While they should not honor the tactics of grumbling, they are also responsible for making sure to listen for grumbling, for where there is grumbling, there are often legitimate failures, mistakes, and problems that should be addressed in the church.

So, how should failures, problems, and mistakes be handled in the church? Consider the following:

1. It is important to always apply the 8th Commandment – to put the best possible application upon a problematic situation.

2. Be a part of the solution! If a parishioner has vocational authority, they should work to fix a problem first before grumbling. Often more energy is exerted via grumbling than it would take to fix the problem.
3. If a parishioner does not have vocational authority to address a situation, they should go to a person who does have authority. However, as they go to the person in authority, they should go with a spirit of 'helpfulness,' not harsh accusation (remember the 8th)
4. If the person in authority is obtuse, cruel, or unsympathetic to the situation, then it is best to work with the guidance of Matthew 18 – try and address the person of authority with another witness/parishioner. Finally, if the person of authority remains obtuse, there remains three options: 1) If it is not an extremely large
5. problem, we let 'love cover a multitude of sins,' 2) If it is a problem that needs to be addressed, and the person of authority will not address it, then it may be important to advocate through 'other' proper means to remedy the problem (i.e., work with a motion via a voters' assembly, contact a district official, begin a resolution path as specified in a constitution, etc), 3) If the problem needs to be addressed and other means have been explored, a parishioner may need to leave the church for another church.

Now, the disciples addressed the neglect of the widows by selecting seven men of good standing to be appointed to the task of serving tables. Why? The reason is two-fold: A) By appointing the seven men to deal with what we often call the 'business/material/council-ish' side of the church, then the disciples were able to not neglect the 'churchly/spiritual/elder-ish' side of the church. Secondly, it was important for the disciples not to be tied up in controversy, for the devil often uses controversies to get parishioners to anger and grumble against preachers/pastors - to the point where parishioners won't hear the Gospel from their pastors. Why does Pastor Richard not have public opinions on carpet color, paint color, line-item-budgets, church coffee, and kitchen ovens? Why does Pastor Richard talk a lot at elder meetings and not a lot at council and voter meetings? Because he doesn't want anything from the business/material/council-ish side to keep the flock from hearing the Gospel. Furthermore, why would a pastor need to have opinions on such things, for there is never enough time to do "Word and Sacrament Ministry," and St. Paul's has plenty of competent leaders able to lead efficiently and effectively in the 'business/material/council-ish' realm.



