

Mad At The Preacher?

A Guide for United Methodists

Are you mad at your preacher?

Has your preacher hurt your feelings?

Is your preacher doing something you don't like in your congregation?

Here's what to do:

1. Pray about it.

“Be angry but do not sin...” (Ephesians 4:26) Anger helps us right wrongs in relationships and situations. But anger also fuels sins of its own unless it is God - directed. Anger tempts us to run to a friend for sympathy and get recruit an ally for our hurt feelings. But the first responsibility of the Christian is to turn to Jesus. Pour out the situation to Jesus and listen to God's guidance in your heart.

2. Truth check. Ask questions.

Old Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier, had a saying, “Be sure you're right. And then go ahead.” Don't miss the first part. There are a lot of misunderstandings in this world because people simply misunderstood what was said or did not know why something was done. Ask questions. Always double check.

3. Make the ever-important distinction:

Is this a matter of principle or personal preference?

Christians can't ask this question too much. Are you mad about something that is your personal preference, taste or ego or is this something that Jesus taught as a matter of principle? Remember, while the purpose of our consumer society is to cater to our personal preferences, the purpose of the church is to teach us how to live the Christian life. The world teaches us that we are entitled to have whatever we want. Christian faith teaches us to sacrifice our preferences for the cause of Christ. Be sure you understand: **in the United Methodist Church, the pastor is not sent to make the congregation happy. The pastor is sent to lead the congregation in faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ.** Sometimes, to be faithful, people need to be called to change even if that makes them mad.

BE SURE TO FOLLOW THESE STEPS BEFORE YOU START TALKING ABOUT YOUR ANGER WITH OTHERS.

No matter what your pastor has done, don't let the actions/words/attitude of your pastor lead YOU to sin. Telling falsehoods about someone is a sin. Spreading rumors and creating divisions in the Body of Christ is a sin. Don't let your anger lead you into sin.

When you have been through these prayerful steps to be sure you are on the right track, it is time to **Speak the truth in love.**

1. Be assured there is no virtue in ignoring a real problem.

United Methodism is a deliberately distinctive way of living the Christian faith that has constructive ways to handle problems and differences for the good of all. One of the most distinctive characteristics of United Methodism is open, appropriate channels available to everyone AND a common passion for us to continue to grow in grace. Moving on toward perfection is the goal of every United Methodist clergy and lay person.. After prayer, self-examination and clarity on the source of your discomfort/anger/discontent, you have no apology for bringing an issue forward in a constructive way. Your issues may be just the gift that the pastor/congregation needs to grow in important new ways.

2. Use the channels which the church provides.

Every United Methodist Church has an elected group of people dedicated to working out the relationships between the pastor, staff and people. That is their job. Their work is clearly outlined in our Book of Discipline and the Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee answers directly to the District Superintendent. Problem-solvers are in place. 1/3 of this group is elected every year ensuring that there is a balance of wisdom and fresh perspective. Because we are a church and each member has made a sacred pledge to support the church, this is the wisdom group for you to turn to. Talk your trouble through with the PPR chair or a member of PPR.

3. When you share your story, be sure that you are telling the truth (that means telling the truth – not stretching the truth) and that you have love and good will in your heart.

We can't solve our problems if people are not honest. Just like the correct diagnosis is absolutely essential to treating a disease, relationship problems can be healed and problems solved only when the truth is spoken. But **we are a church.** We are not a civic club or a social club or a corporation. We are bound to Christ to love our neighbor as Christ loved us. If you can't speak the truth in love and good will, you need to go back to more praying. Good will to all is the bottom line of fellowship in Christ.

4. Do you have a constructive remedy to offer? Be sure you are part of the solution as well as lifting up a problem.

Sometimes, those on S/PPRC will have just the right pool of ideas to come up with the help/change that is needed to bring peace and healing. That's their job. But, as the person who is bringing the complaint/discontent, you also need to be part of the solution. What would help?

5. Now it's time for you to trust them and stop talking. Respect your fellow church members, their responsibility and their wisdom.

Now it's your turn to be constructive, your turn to listen, your turn to trust. Pastor Parish is a confidential setting for a reason. **There is always more going on in a church than is appropriate to say in public.** Confidentiality is not for the sake of covering anything up. Confidentiality is for the sake of getting to the whole truth and saving the church from being unnecessarily torn up. THIS IS OUR UNITED METHODIST WAY. We have **great respect** for the wisdom of our elected leaders from the congregation.

Too often, there are church members who, lash out against their fellow church members on PPR when the PPR doesn't "take their side". I've heard all kinds of sad attacks on PPR:

"They are just handpicked by the Pastor".

That's a lie. The pastor doesn't have a vote when PPR members are chosen.

PPR members are nominated by the Lay Leadership Committee (a committee of church members elected at Charge Conference) and the election of PPR members takes place at the Administrative Council each year. PPR members are chosen from the congregation BY the congregation.

"They just do whatever the preacher says..."

First of all, no individual member can know that. What is said in PPR is confidential so, outside the committee, you don't really know what is said. And second, that doesn't show much respect for people you worship with. And 3rd, the PPR work is directly accountable to the District Superintendent. That personal relationship – along with the guidelines of the Discipline—is what tells the PPR committee what to do.

6. Keep praying and forgive.

There is no church that has a perfect preacher.

And there is no preacher that has a perfect church.

We've got to learn to work together for the greater cause of Christ – putting aside our personal preferences (both pastors and people) to show God's great love to the world. Fighting it out, holding grudges, spreading rumors, looking for things to criticize all represent unchristian behavior.

7. Remember our United Methodist way – constant evaluation and an itinerant system of moving. This is built into our system. You can count on it. We never skip a year of this process.

Every year, United Methodist preachers are formally evaluated on multiple levels.

Every year, United Methodist appointments are reconsidered.

Moving pastors is a way of life for United Methodists. Every pastor has made a commitment to our system of moving.

If you love your preacher, make the most of your time together.

Cherish the gifts your pastor brings. Remember from the very beginning that your pastor won't be there forever. Don't take this special time for granted and don't make it more than it is: every appointment in a United Methodist Church is an itinerant appointment.

If you don't get along too well with the preacher you have, be true to your faith relax and do as much good for your church as you can. That preacher will be moving on. You can be sure of it. No need to stir up trouble. That will only hurt your church next time an appointment change is made. Our church is designed to save people from these painful fights where we wound people in the congregation and compromise our witness.