

Eight Warning Signs for Forced Terminations of Pastors

Today (May 2012) summarized some fascinating information about forced pastor terminations. Using the combined research of the National Congregations Study and the Review of Religious Research, the magazine noted eight warning signs or predictors for forced terminations.

Keep in mind that this research does not tell the why of terminations; rather it deals with certain categories where pastors are more likely to lose their jobs.

1. **If the church had a recent church fight.** This makes sense. A fighting church is a mad church. A mad church is more likely to take it out their anger on their pastors.
2. **If the church is declining in attendance.** Obviously the decline is often blamed on the pastor.
3. **If the pastor's sermon lasts between 11 and 20 minutes.** I never thought about this one. Pastors with shorter sermons are twice as likely to lose their jobs as longer-winded pastors. I'll yield to the readers to figure this one out.
4. **If your church has almost no men.** Seven percent of churches report that 90 percent or more of their attendees are females. When that is the case, there is a one in five chance the pastor will be asked to leave.
5. **If the pastor is a woman.** My denomination of 45,000 churches has almost no women pastors, so I'm certainly no expert here. But these churches are nearly twice as likely to fire their pastors.
6. **If the pastor is young.** If the pastor is under 30 years old, the church is three and half times more likely to let the pastor go. By the way, "three and half times" is a huge statistical variance.
7. **If the congregation is old.** If 75 to 89 percent of your church is over 60, you are three times more likely to fire the pastor. If you have virtually no adults under 35, the church is even more likely to force terminate the pastor
8. **If a slight majority of the congregation is poor.** If 56 to 74 percent of your congregation earns less than \$25,000, you could be in trouble. Half of these churches have fired pastors. But if the percentage of the poor goes to 75 percent and above, you can rest easy. Very few pastors are asked to leave the very poorest churches.

Again, let me remind you that these eight warning signs are correlative factors, and are not necessarily causative. Still, if you are a young pastor under 30 years old in a

declining congregation that is comprised primarily of poor old women, and if the church has a history of fights, please be very careful.

I know that being forced out of a church is a very painful situation. I have heard the story so many times. The experience leaves a scar with the pastor and with the church.

Have you been in churches that match one or more of the profiles above? What was your experience? Have you been forced terminated from a church? What can you teach us from your experience?

At the very least, we would welcome the opportunity to pray for you if you have experienced this pain, or if you are in a difficult situation in your church. We welcome your comments, with your name or in anonymity.

Pastor to Pastor is the Saturday blog series at ThomRainer.com. Pastors and staff, if we can help in any way, contact Steve Drake, our director of pastoral relations, at Steve.Drake@LifeWay.com. We also welcome contacts from laypersons in churches asking questions about pastors, churches, or the pastor search process.