

Advise from Paul Browning who survived a 363

Thanks Paul.

Wow what a document. If the Church can do this to a tough bugger like you I can only imagine what they are doing to those smiling pastor perfect faces out there.

What you say is very important, especially: ' the **Manuel allows Presbytery to ignore 363 Review recommendations**

Casey

Hi Casey, what you say is sooo true. I am way tougher than most. I will probably do some consulting work helping clergy in crisis. I'm not a lawyer so I can advocate within the system without Presbytery accusing my client of not following the system. At the same time, I have a close friend who is one of the top legal minds in Canada...a former vice president and chief corporate council of a major company who retired at 50 and is happy to advise me on cases.

I have edited the following for you to publish as you will:

I am attaching my 363 review for your work. It is not a confidential document so feel free to share it as you see fit.

One of the significant features of this review is the way the Executive of Muskoka Presbytery passed motions which were different and incongruent with the recommendations of the Review. It seems that they had made up their minds to get rid of me.

Both the original recommendations and the ones Presbytery approved are at the end of the review document. The Presbytery Ex ended up being reviewed too by Conference because they didn't follow the recommendations, but **the Manuel allows Presbytery to ignore 363 Review recommendations** and so Conference upheld their work.

Some things I learned:

1. If you are getting reactive, get help....get laid, get a circle of friends together, get a good therapist, do what you need to do to get perspective. I became reactive because I allowed my emotional need for approval to get involved with my job. I also expected fairness and support, both of which usually evaporate when powerful lay people become angry with you. I had to learn that when people freak out and get nasty, it has nothing to do with me and everything to do with them...

When I reacted to them with frustration, hurt and anger it was because I expected them to love and support me for the good work I was doing. The result was that I lost my professional perspective and my power. When I detached from my expectations that the church was supposed to be fair and when I accepted that the craziness was not of my creation, I was able to step outside the craziness and reclaim my power.

2. I had a complete paper trail that I kept from before I arrived and that backed up everything I presented in my review. I presented a binder with it all laid out to every member of the review team. Not only did it establish my position, it led them in the right direction to figure out where the lies and meanness were coming from. I also provided a digital version of my submission so that they could easily cut and paste from it in their review which they did quite frequently.

3. I publically embraced the review instead of playing the victim role. I let others defend me instead of me and encouraged everyone in the congregation to write a letter sharing their experience of my ministry, whether they had concerns about me or not.

Because I appeared relaxed was explained how important it was for the review team to have a fair and honest representation from the members, about 130 families wrote and another 40 asked for interviews...about 1/2 of the active families and 90% of the submissions were positive.

A couple of well liked members in the congregation also phoned and asked supportive members to write. They reported to my wife so I could remain more detached.

4. I chose the wisest and shrewdest friends I had to advise me on my reactions every step of the way and ran everything I wrote and said by three of them. Two of the 5 were lawyers, but I never mentioned "lawyer" in the process, except once I said to the review team that I hoped justice and honesty would prevail so I wouldn't have to go the legal route.

I always took a respected lay leader that I trusted with me to all my meetings. And if I had chosen to sue, my ducks were in a row.

5. For my own sanity and to lower my anxiety, I came to terms with the fact that I might need to leave the church, whatever happened. I let it be known discretely that I might need a job outside the church to feed my family because of the review and was offered one. Knowing that I could survive without the church greatly lowered my anxiety level and gave me more personal power back.

6. Ministry is just an experiment with me now. I assume nothing. I remain a "non anxious presence". The thought of leaving the church is not a struggle for me anymore. And the first moment my Board does not support me on a key strategic or personal matter, I will plan my exit on my terms as soon as possible, before anyone knows there's a problem. (This is the standard United Church approach that has allowed many clergy to survive).

I will no longer look to Presbytery or anyone in the church to help me again. I am way more focused on what "is" than the "potential" of what "could be".

Hope some of this is helpful to someone.

Blessings,
Paul Browning