

Narcissism in the Pulpit

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Generally most church conflict is caused by carnality, selfishness, and ambition (1 Cor 3:3). Combine these sinful behaviors with an antagonist or two and you can have serious conflict problems. Add selfish ambition to these characteristics in the Senior Pastor and spiritual abuse can be meted out in sinful and destructive ways. But there is one unbearable situation that unfortunately occurs too often within the church that I wish to discuss: That of a pastor with a personality disorder shepherding (or pretending to shepherd) the church body. Generally, individuals who manifest serious personality disorders such as schizophrenia, paranoid, borderline, etc., are not stable enough to survive in leadership positions. But due to the nature of the pastorate and the way in which pastors are called and dismissed, there is one personality that somehow manages to survive in the pastorate— that of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

Generally it takes a long time before this devious individual is identified for who and what he really is, and some of the most gifted are able to survive for years in one location. Many though will have short tenures. Depending on the size of the congregation and the perceptiveness of the leadership it may take 6 months to a couple of years before the problem is clearly perceived— that the pastor is devoid of spiritual depth, personal character, and really could care less about the welfare of the sheep. If the destructive characteristics are not identified and the narcissist is allowed to minister long-range, serious problems will manifest. The NPD pastors can be very abusive and destructive to the church, and wreak havoc in the personal lives of those closest to them— particularly staff and leadership.

What is Narcissistic Personality Disorder?

The key term to describe a narcissist is “self-aggrandizement.” All of us to one degree or another manifest some narcissistic characteristics, particularly when we are younger or in our youth, but most of us grow out of it as we mature. There are those, though, who because of their unique temperament, combined with improper upbringing and training that often includes trauma, who develop warped belief structures about themselves and others by their teen years. Unfortunately they not only do not grow out of it, but they become firmly entrenched and concerned with “Me, My, I, and Myself.” They live out a life of “It’s all about Me: my wishes, my desires, my kingdom come...” In essence another person with a certifiable personality disorder is unleashed upon the world. One mistaken belief is that a narcissist is in love with himself, but in reality he is in love with an image of himself— an image he creates and believes about himself based upon his perception of how he perceives that other people view him. Unfortunately, to love only images renders the individual unable to really love and care for the person who is behind the image. The

narcissist does not really love himself or others around him. He loves his projected image and the image he projects onto others (more about this later).

A personality disorder is a repeatable pattern of abnormal behavior that doesn't change even though it upsets and causes emotional trouble with other people at work and in personal relationships. "It is not limited to episodes of mental illness, and it is not caused by drug or alcohol use, head injury, or illness. There are about a dozen different behavior patterns classified as personality disorders by DSM-IV. All the personality disorders show up as deviations from normal in one or more of the following areas:

1. cognition– i.e., perception, thinking, and interpretation of oneself, other people, and events
2. affectivity– i.e., emotional responses (range, intensity, lability, appropriateness)
3. interpersonal functions
4. impulsivity." (Ashmun)

The online UK Dictionary of Psychology defines the narcissistic personality as:

"Extremely selfish and self-centred, people with a narcissistic personality have a grandiose view of their uniqueness, achievements, and talents and an insatiable craving for admiration and approval from others. They are arrogant, exploitative to achieve their own goals and expect much more from others than they themselves are willing to give."

The World Health Organization, in its ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioral Disorders, describes narcissism:

"Narcissistic Personality Disorder is a disorder in which a person has a grandiose self-importance, preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, a driven desire for attention and admiration, an intolerance of criticism, and disturbed self-centered interpersonal relations. They are often referred to as being conceited. They generally have a low self-esteem as well. They act selfish interpersonally, with a sense of entitlement."

Sam Vaknin, described by the "New York Times" as the "world's leading expert on narcissism", describes narcissism:

"Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is an all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning by early adulthood and present in various contexts. Five (or more) of the following criteria must be met:

1. Feels grandiose and self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements & talents to the point of lying, demands to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).
2. Is obsessed with fantasies of unlimited success, fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled brilliance (the cerebral narcissist), bodily beauty or sexual performance (the somatic narcissist), or ideal, everlasting, all-conquering love or passion.
3. Firmly convinced that he or she is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, should only be treated by, or associate with, other special or unique, or high-status people (or institutions).

4. Requires excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation— or, failing that, wishes to be feared and to be notorious (narcissistic supply).
5. Feels entitled. Expects unreasonable or special & favorable priority treatment. Demands automatic and full compliance with his or her expectations.
6. Is “interpersonally exploitative”, i.e., uses others to achieve his or her own ends.
7. Devoid of empathy. Is unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge the feelings and needs of others.
8. Constantly envious of others or believes that they feel the same about him or her.
9. Arrogant, haughty behaviours or attitudes coupled with rage when frustrated, contradicted, or confronted.”

“The overall definition of someone with a narcissistic personality disorder is characterized by a combination of severe limitations in understanding other people and their feelings, as well as an excessive pursuit of what are called narcissistic supplies, such as admiration, attention, status, understanding, support, money, power, control, or perfection in some form. While all of us need these supplies in adequate amounts to feel a sense of well being, the narcissist pursues them with an unrelenting desperation and a keen ability to manipulate others. Meanwhile the outer persona of the NPD individual is generally one of confidence and control, alongside a smooth or charming demeanor. As your involvement with the narcissist develops you will notice that the relationship increasingly becomes one-way with you in the primary giving position.”
(Payson, p.13)

If you have encountered a narcissist in your world, you may be able to identify what you have been dealing with from just the above descriptions. You may have just have had an “ah-ha” experience, as I did when I first began researching this personality. Or you may yet be unsure— Sam Vaknin states: “It is close to impossible (to immediately recognize a narcissist) and that is the secret of their astounding success. Narcissists are good actors. They are adept at charming others, persuading them, manipulating them, or otherwise influencing them to do their bidding. The narcissist’s sense of self-worth is unstable (labile), so the narcissist relies on input from other people to regulate his self-esteem and self-confidence. He focuses on potential sources of supply and engulfs them with focused attention and simulated deep emotions. Only in later encounter, as time passes and the number of interactions grows, is it possible to tell that someone is a narcissist.

“...[T]he narcissist is never the person he appears to be in the public sphere. The NPD individual is generally entirely unconscious of his disturbance. All avenues of experiencing self are dependent on successfully acquiring control, praise, admiration, special consideration, power, status, etc. Externally, the person appears confident and in control while the interior life is one of constant self-critiquing against the illusive standards of greater success and control. The result is often a desperate discontent and, at times, an overall feeling of deep inner unhappiness.”

Hopefully, by the time you have finished reading the information within this [document], you should be able to have a clear understanding as to whether the problems you are experiencing with your pastor are being caused by Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

It is estimated that from .7 to 1 percent of the population have NPD, the majority being men. An inordinate percentage make their way into Hollywood and into the pulpit. Most NPD individuals

are completely unaware of having significant problems. Unfortunately very few seek help for their disorders, and progress very slowly if at all in treatment. Most quit receiving help as soon as their presenting challenges disappear. They are very reluctant to open up and trust making therapy extremely difficult. Compounding this is the practice in counselling of giving unconditional positive regard, and part of that is the therapist generally having to take what is said by the narcissist at face value. Most of their perceptions about themselves and others are inaccurate and become wildly misinterpreted leading the narcissist to convince himself and others, that he/she is highly respected and liked despite a history of callous and exploitative personal interactions. Even if it is clearly pointed out how their behavior causes a lot of emotional distress to others and even themselves, they will not (or cannot) change their behavior. In fact, they will not even be distressed by their own behavior. Most information regarding the behavior of narcissists comes from the survivors— children of narcissists, spouses of narcissists, or friends/co-workers. Many of these end up in therapy in attempt to sort out their traumatic experiences with the narcissist.

“When you enter the web of the Narcissist, you leave yourself behind.” (Hotchkiss, p.62).

How to Identify a Narcissist

The purpose of this resource is not to label or pigeonhole pastors, but rather to provide understanding. People with NPD are people who are to be pitied, and people who need to be understood. Unfortunately they are also people who need to be contained, monitored, and often removed from powerful and influential positions so that they do not destroy themselves and others. Narcissists come in varying degrees of severity and functionality, and based on the following descriptions you should be able to determine the quantity and quality of dysfunction of your current situation. Nearly everyone has some narcissistic traits— it is possible to be arrogant, selfish, conceited, or out of touch without being a narcissist. The practical test as described by Sam Vaknin, is that with normal people, no matter how difficult, you can get some improvements, at least temporarily, by saying, essentially, “Please have a heart.” This doesn’t work with narcissists; in fact, it usually makes things worse. We are not setting up a witch hunt here. If you feel that your pastor or someone else you know is manifesting a large majority of these symptoms and you find that very disconcerting, then evaluate a few other people you know to see if they manifest many of these symptoms. If there is a clear distinction between the “narcissist” and others you evaluate then you probably have seen things clearly. Do check with a few others who you respect as well though to make sure you are not being an impartial, biased antagonist.

Realize that different people will experience the narcissist in differing ways, depending on how the narcissist sees you fitting into his world— whether you are supporting his unconscious agenda for himself. Narcissists act differently with different people, and it is usually only those who are close to them, or have a lot of contact that the symptoms and patterns become identifiable. Here are the more common symptoms:

Exaggerated descriptions of Self: The simplest way to identify the narcissist it to note how they show their exaggerated sense of self by talking about family, work, and life in general as if there is no one else in the picture. Whatever they are involved in, they are the star, and they will lead you to believe that they are bearing heroic responsibility for everything that gets done—

everyone they deal with is generally portrayed as undependable, uncooperative, or otherwise unfit or unimportant. They may convince you to feel sorry for them because of all the challenges they have had to overcome and are still overcoming to be so successful. Unfortunately, most people will never discover how untrue all this is unless they visit the narcissist's environments and workplace and discover that, in actuality, others are pulling their share of the load, and in many cases actually carrying the narcissist along and compensating for him/her. Sometimes the narcissist will be publicly boastful and self-aggrandizing, but most often they save their conceit and autocratic opinions for their nearest and dearest. Common conspicuous behaviours will include their expectation of special treatment or admiration on their claim that they (a) know important, powerful or famous people, or (b) that they are extraordinarily intelligent or talented. Because of this they will then exude a "sense of entitlement", and will only want to be associated with other special or "high-status" people. For this they will then want praise, compliments, and expressions of envy. For the NPD pastor, the "praise and worship time" as he greets the worshipers after the service is far more important than the praise and worship time during the service.

Lack of Empathy: If you work closely with a narcissist you will soon discover that they have a total inability to recognize or sympathize with other people's feelings and needs. In fact, it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of the narcissist's lack of empathy. They will quickly tune out when others want to either talk about themselves, or about things which are close to their hearts. In fact, the narcissist's inability to pay attention when someone else is talking may lead you to believe that they may have some neurological problems that effect their cognitive functioning. Because of this inability to listen to or understand others needs it is very easy for the narcissist to use others to meet their own wishes and desired ends. If they do not know what you want or don't want, it is easy for them to believe that you must want what they want. At those rare times which the narcissist has pangs of conscience, or when others have pointed out his callousness and disregard for others, the narcissist may report that "they really do not have much feeling, that they are numb inside, that they have a hard heart." This hard-heartedness will often manifest itself in arrogant, patronizing or contemptuous behaviours or attitudes— they do not feel the nastiness which comes out of them, and therefore do not empathize with others having to put up with it.

The biggest challenge and frustration that board members, elders, leaders or staff members will have in dealing with the narcissist pastor can be alleviated when it is realized that because the narcissist has no empathy, that they will be impaired in both their thinking (cognition) and feeling (affectivity). Even if very intelligent, the narcissist cannot reason well. Ashmun writes:

"They don't understand the meaning of what people say and they don't grasp the meaning of the written word either— because so much of the meaning of anything we say depends on context and affect, narcissists (lacking empathy and thus lacking both context and affect) hear only the words. (Discussions with narcissists can really be weird and disconcerting; they seem to think that using some of the same words means that they are following a line of conversation or reasoning. Thus, they will go off on tangents and irrelevancies, apparently in the blithe delusion that they understand what others are talking about). And, frankly, they don't hear all the words, either. They can pay attention only to stuff that has them in it. This is not merely a bad habit— it's a cognitive deficiency. Narcissists pay attention only to themselves and stuff that affects them personally. However, since they don't know what other people are doing, narcissists can't judge

what will affect them personally and seem never to learn that when they cause trouble they will get trouble back. They won't take other people's feelings into consideration and so they overlook the fact that other people will react with feeling when abused or exploited and that most people get really pissed off by being lied to or lied about." (Ashmun)

I would challenge you to carefully think through the previous point— read it through until you see the many implications. It is a critical understanding to grasp if you want to properly perceive your own situation with a narcissist. It will explain so much of the confusing random discrepancies that occur in a church run by a narcissist.

Verbally abusing others: The narcissist is only concerned with what he can gain personally from other people. If there is no perceived benefit flowing directly to the narcissist, then that person is seen as unimportant. Therefore most people are seen as the little people, lower cast, nobodies. The narcissist will speak disparagingly about these people behind their backs to those he sees as important (like him). Most of the abuse metered out by the narcissist will be in the form of verbal and emotional abuse or neglect. Groups of people that the narcissist despises can be verbal whipping posts— gays, minorities, welfare recipients, certain nationalities, etc., etc.

Charm/Flattery: Juxtaposed against all those "little people" that the narcissist has not immediate use for (other than to tell him how wonderful he is), there are those individuals who are perceived as having value because of what they may be able to do for the narcissist. These people will be charmed and flattered and catered to until they are no longer of use. Afterwards they may be feared and treated civilly, but if there is no fear the narcissist will treat them as the other "low life, nobodies."

"The narcissist lives in a world of all or nothing. His behaviour metamorphoses, kaleidoscopically, from over-valuing (idealizing) the useful person— to a severe devaluation of same. The narcissist abhors, almost physiologically, people judged by him to be 'useless'. These rapid alterations between absolute overvaluation (idealization) to complete devaluation make long-term interpersonal relationships with the narcissist all but impossible. He exploits people, sometimes unintentionally, but always ruthlessly and mercilessly. He uses them to obtain confirmation of the accuracy of his grandiose self-portrait." (Vaknin)

"...[T]he narcissist has learned that other people do not always do his bidding or meet his demands in the way that he expects. He has therefore, developed formidable manipulation skills, at times deceitfully, to achieve his goals. Sometimes these skills are a highly developed ability to charm and bring others under his spell or influence. Other times he may be exceptionally good at utilizing intimidation, power plays, or intellectual prowess. Yet another style is the martyr manipulation of using helplessness, obligation, or guilt. In many ways, the narcissist has assessed, with considerable skill, the vulnerabilities of another person. He then effectively manipulates this person until he achieves his desired outcome." (Payson, p. 23)

"...you may encounter the NPD individual who appears to never express anger. He may promptly or cheerfully agree with you on the surface and, once out of your sight, go about doing exactly as he pleases. When you attempt to confront this behaviour, you are met with an endless variety of smoke screens consisting of forgetfulness, rationalizations, blame, or simply playing dumb as to how such a misunderstanding occurred...."(Payson, p.25)

“In a deeper relationship, the NPD individual will exhaust you in his need for your constant attention and appreciative support, yet his desire to charm you will insidiously give way to sarcasm and competitive tension.” (Payson, p.27)

Confusion of Love: The narcissist is deeply confused as to what real love is:

“To a narcissist, love is interchangeable with other emotions, such as awe, respect, admiration, attention, or even being feared (collectively known as Narcissistic Supply). Thus, to him, a projected image, which provokes these reactions in others, is both “loveable and loved”. It also feels like self-love. The narcissist is forced to use other people in order to feel that he exists. It is through their eyes and through their behaviour that he obtains proof of his uniqueness and grandeur. He is a habitual “people-junkie”. With time, he comes to regard those around him as mere instruments of gratification, as two-dimensional cartoon figures with negligible lines in the script of his magnificent life. He becomes unscrupulous, never bothered by the constant exploitation of his milieu, indifferent to the consequences of his actions, the damage and the pain that he inflicts on others and even the social condemnation and sanctions that he often has to endure.” (Vaknin)

“They’re pretty good at maintaining a conventional persona in superficial associations with people who mean absolutely nothing to them, and they’ll flatter the hell out of you if you have something they can use or if, for some reason, they perceive you as an authority figure. That is, as long as they think you don’t count or they’re afraid of you, they’ll treat you well enough that you may mistake it for love. But, as soon as you try to get close to them, they’ll say that you are too demanding — and, if you ever say “I love you,” they’ll presume that you belong to them as a possession or an appendage, and treat you very very badly right away. The abrupt change from decent treatment to outright abuse is very shocking and bewildering, and it’s so contrary to normal experience that I was plenty old before I realized that it was actually my expression of affection that triggered the narcissists’ nasty reactions. Once they know you are emotionally attached to them, they expect to be able to use you like an appliance and shove you around like a piece of furniture. If you object, then they’ll say that obviously you don’t really love them or else you’d let them do whatever they want with you. If you should be so uppity as to express a mind and heart of your own, then they will cut you off — just like that, sometimes trashing you and all your friends on the way out the door. The narcissist will treat you just like a broken toy or tool or an unruly body part: ‘If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off’ [Matt. 18:8]. This means you.” (Ashmun)

Contradictory Statements: Another telling thing that narcissists do is contradict themselves. They will tell you one thing, and later tell you that they told you something different and deny that they said the first thing. The narcissist pastor will say something to one group of people in the church and then say something completely different to another group or individual. When confronted about this contradiction they will question your sanity with, “I never said any such thing. How could you think that?” The scariest part of this is that the narcissist will believe his lies. He may change his mind entirely about a certain opinion or course of action; simply because he believes it will please an important person in his life. He then believes that this is really his opinion and that he has always held it. By continually making himself to be what he wants himself to be (his image of himself) there is freedom to make modifications to the image at any time, if he feels this is what is required to gain approval.

Copying Authorities: Most of the narcissists you will deal with in the pulpit will be educated people, with high IQs, middle class backgrounds and good schooling—but as you get to know them you will think their thinking and behaviour is not only illogical but borders on bizarre. You will have to get to know them quite well in order to understand them. Realize that their life is filled up with bits and pieces that are borrowed from other people—people whom they see as authorities in specific areas. These authorities will usually be people that they have met or know, and may not even be viewed as an authority by other people—just by the narcissist. It is from these people that the narcissist will form his opinions, tastes, ideas, specific behaviours—all those things that make up their visible lives.

“Some narcissists seek to imitate or even emulate their (ever changing) role models. It is as if by imitating the object of his envy, the narcissist *becomes* that object. So, narcissists are likely to adopt their boss’ typical gestures, the vocabulary of a successful politician, the dress code of a movie star, the views of an esteemed tycoon, even the countenance and actions of the (fictitious) hero of a movie or a novel.” (Vaknin)

Authoritarian: The narcissistic pastor is obsessed with who has the power in the church. They may even pick one or more people that becomes their authority and sounding board for almost every decision. They may argue vehemently with that person, but will always want to know their opinion.

“At other times, the intimidation dynamic may be more overt, such as when the NPD person directly wields his authority by making continual references to the differences in your positions of power, professional stature, status or money.” (Payson p. 39)

‘Narcissists are totally and inflexibly authoritarian.... They want to be authority figures and, short of that, they want to be associated with authority figures. In their hearts, they know they can’t think well, have no judgment about what matters, are not connected with the world they inhabit, so they cling fanatically to the opinions of people they regard as authority figures — such as their parents, teachers, doctors, ministers. Where relevant, this may include scientists or professors or artists, but narcissists stick to people they know personally, since they aren’t engaged enough with the world to get their authoritative opinions from TV, movies, books or dead geniuses/saints/heroes. If they get in trouble over some or another opinion they’ve put forth, they’ll blame the source— ‘It was okay with Dr. Somebody,’ ‘My father taught me that,’ etc.’” (Ashmun)

Rarely will you see a narcissist pour themselves “whole-heartedly” into their work (though they will usually tell you how many hours they put in), because they really have no passion for their work. Rather they are borrowing their opinions and preferences and tastes from whoever strikes them as an authority at the moment. In the pulpit, the narcissist pastor will preach sermons that are often borrowed or stolen from others. They will often be emotionless manifestoes of “steps to a better life” or whatever else he believes the shallow masses want to hear. Steps taken from some other perceived authority, but the enigma will be the glaring evidence that what is preached is not lived.

Insincere emotions: Be not fooled that the narcissist will manufacture emotion if he feels it is important for his cause. It is this talent that explains the success of so many narcissists

in Hollywood. At times he will get caught up in his own stunned surprise that his life is turning out so well, when in reality he knows it is a sham.

“He feels corrupt, deserving to fail, to be disgraced and punished. He is forever surprised and thankful when good things happen to him. Out of touch with his own emotions and with his capabilities, he either exaggerates them or underestimates them.” (Vaknin)

Immature conscience: Another aspect of the narcissist that is particularly frustrating in the church is that the narcissist lacks a mature conscience and is restrained more by fear of being punished or of damaging his pristine reputations (pristine in his own mind). If he is sure he will not get caught and that a certain course of action will further his ends— look out.

“Their moral intelligence is about at the level of a bright five- or six-year-old; the only rules they recognize are things that have been specifically required, permitted, prohibited, or disapproved of by authority figures they know personally. Anyhow, narcissists can’t be counted on not to do something *just because* it’s wrong, illegal, or will hurt someone, as long as they think that they can get away with it or that you can’t stop them or punish them (i.e., they don’t care what you think unless they’re afraid of you). (Ashmun)

A higher functioning NPD individual will have a rigid sense of right and wrong which tends to be black and white, or concrete. She will often be extremely judgmental of others and harsh in her opinion of the necessary punishments for wrongdoing. While she may rarely apply these same standards of punishment to herself, she will, however, be concerned about following her standards of right and wrong.... The lower functioning NPD individual (in closer proximity to the sociopath on the continuum) will be prone to constantly bending the rules for himself although outwardly he may criticize others for a similar infraction or transgression.” (Payson, p. 19)

Hyper sensitive to criticism: If you want to make an enemy, just criticize a narcissist a few times in front of people that he believes are important.

“The brittle defences, which protect the NPD person from feeling the inner wound to his unconscious experience of self, cause him to be exquisitely sensitive too the slightest possibility of criticism, being overlooked, or having his wishes dismissed.” (Payson, p. 20)

“Narcissists are (a) extremely sensitive to personal criticism and (b) extremely critical of other people. They think that they must *be seen as* perfect or superior or infallible, next to god-like (if not actually divine, then sitting on the right hand of God)— or else they are worthless. There’s no middle ground of ordinary normal humanity for narcissists. They can’t tolerate the least disagreement. In fact, if you say, ‘Please don’t do that again— it hurts,’ narcissists will turn around and do it again harder to prove that they were right the first time; their reasoning seems to be something like ‘I am a good person and can do no wrong; therefore, I didn’t hurt you and you are lying about it now....’ ...Narcissists are habitually cruel in little ways, as well as big ones, because they’re paying attention to their fantasy and not to you, but the bruises on you are REAL, not in your imagination.... narcissists will say ANYTHING, they will trash anyone in their own self-justification, and then they will expect the immediate restoration of the status quo. They will attack you (mainly verbally) and spew a load of bile, insult, abuse, contempt, threats,

etc., and then– well, it’s kind of like they had indigestion and the vicious tirade worked like a burp: ‘There. Now I feel better. Where were we?’” (Ashmun)

“Shame is the feeling that lurks beneath all unhealthy narcissism, and the inability to process shame in healthy ways– to face it, neutralize it, and move on as healthier individuals do – leads to the characteristic postures, attitudes, and behaviour of the Narcissist” (Hotchkiss p.6). Any criticism will stir up that shame, and narcissistic behaviours which are designed to take the focus off the shame, and project blame on others.

Criticalness: Staff members will be the brunt of nit-picky criticalness day in and day out. Nothing will ever be good enough and most everything will have be changed to suit the bosses wishes. A thick skin is a prerequisite for working around the narcissist.

“And they criticize, gripe, and complain about almost everything and almost everyone almost all the time. There are usually a favored few whom narcissists regard as absolutely above reproach, even for egregious misconduct or actual crime, and about whom they won’t brook the slightest criticism. These are people the narcissists are terrified of, though they’ll tell you that what they feel is love and respect; apparently they don’t know the difference between fear and love. Narcissists just get worse and worse as they grow older; their parents and other authority figures that they’ve feared die off, and there’s less and less outside influence to keep them in check.” (Ashmun)

Defensiveness: The narcissistic pastor is hyper-sensitive to criticism:

“The narcissist perceives every disagreement– let alone criticism– as nothing short of a threat. He reacts defensively. He becomes indignant, aggressive and cold. He detaches emotionally for fear of yet another (narcissistic) injury. He devalues the person who made the disparaging remark. By holding the critic in contempt, by diminishing the stature of the discordant conversant – the narcissist minimizes the impact of the disagreement or criticism on himself. This is a defence mechanism known as cognitive dissonance.” (Vaknin)

“Narcissists forever shift the blame, pass the buck, and engage in cognitive dissonance.” (Vaknin)

“The persona that many Narcissists present to the world often comes across to others as a ‘superiority complex.’ But behind the mask of arrogance is a fragile internal balloon of self-esteem that is never satisfied with being good or even very good – if they are not better than, then they are worthless. Value is always relative, never absolute. From their point of view, if someone else’s stock goes up, theirs automatically goes down. Conversely, if they are feeling deflated, they can reinflate themselves by diminishing, debasing, or degrading someone else. This is the reason why Narcissists are often bossy, judgmental, perfectionistic, and power-hungry. They are simply trying to secure the kind of status that will afford them the most distance from the taint of personal defect and shame. If their balloon gets torn by the ill winds of life, they can repair themselves by showing someone else to be inferior. At times, this can be very subtle.” (Hotchkiss p.11)

“By contrast, the individual with a character disorder lacks the ability to recognize that he has a problem and, if confronted with this possibility, would not consider himself responsible in the

matter. Essentially, the only difficulties or pain the NPD person will be conscious of are those negative consequences that his behaviours bring about, especially in his relationships. Regardless of his culpability, the NPD person will blame everyone else or the circumstances of his life rather than acknowledge that he has significant problems. A person who has psychological pain and is able to see his problems and expects others to take responsibility instead. *Consequently, the deep and severe disturbance of an NPD person is primarily seen in the pain he or she inflicts on others.*"(Payson, p. 17)

Delusions of Grandeur: The NPD pastor will tell others, particularly those who live elsewhere, about how incredibly wonderful his church is, how attendance has grown, etc., because of how wonderful he is. (Of course all these wonderful things occur in the face of his incompetent board, elders and staff). The scary thing is that he will believe many of things he says even when the facts reveal the opposite:

"Narcissists are grandiose. They live in an artificial self invented from fantasies of absolute or perfect power, genius, beauty, etc. As Freud said of narcissists, these people act like they're in love with themselves. And they are in love with an ideal image of themselves– or they want you to be in love with their pretend self, it's hard to tell just what's going on. Like anyone in love, their attention and energy are drawn to the beloved and away from everyday practicalities. Narcissists' fantasies are static– they've fallen in love with an image in a mirror or, more accurately, in a pool of water, so that movement causes the image to dissolve into ripples; to see the adored reflection they must remain perfectly still. Narcissists' fantasies are tableaux or scenes, stage sets; narcissists are hung up on a particular picture that they think reflects their true selves (as opposed to the real self– warts and all). Narcissists don't see themselves doing anything except being adored, and they don't see anyone else doing anything except adoring them. Moreover, they don't see these images as potentials that they may some day be able to live out, if they get lucky or everything goes right: they see these pictures as the real way they want to be seen right now.... These artificial self fantasies are also static in time, going back unchanged to early adolescence or even to childhood; the narcissists' self-images don't change with time, so that you will find, for instance, female narcissists clinging to retro styles, still living the picture of the perfect woman of 1945 or 1965 as depicted in *The Ladies' Home Journal* or *Seventeen* or *Vogue* of that era, and male narcissists still hung up on images of comic-book or ripping adventure heroes from their youth. Though narcissists like pictures rather than stories, they like still pictures, not moving ones, so they don't base their fantasies on movies or TV.

"Unless one has the experience of dealing with narcissism, it is difficult to appreciate how strong a force drives the grandiosity of the narcissism. Remember the phrases, "I am the greatest; I am all powerful; the space is mine; it belongs to me; only what I want matters." Furthermore, since narcissism is ruled by "black and white" thinking, it is great, or it is nothing, and therefore a failure. There is no space for collaboration, for becoming or for emergence of a process." (Ashmun)

"The covert narcissist may manifest his persona in a role that is identified as humanitarian, such as the doctor, therapist, minister or missionary. In this circumstance the narcissistic needs for attention are acquired through the role, as the NPD individual harbours the grandiose fantasies inwardly that he is one of the "chosen" people, doing good work for the betterment of humanity.

The narcissistic grandiosity in these circumstance is manifested in a self-righteous pride and a feeling of self-importance that has little to do with the person's genuine ability for empathizing with the feelings and needs of others." (Payson, p. 28)

Workaholic: The narcissist pastor will tell everyone about the incredible amount of hours he works. 60, 80 hours a week..., etc. But don't be fooled:

"Narcissists have strange work habits. Normal people work for a goal or a product, even if the goal is only a pay check. Normal people measure things by how much they have to spend (in time, work, energy) to get the desired results. Normal people desire idleness from time to time, usually wanting as much free time as they can get to pursue their own thoughts and pleasures and interests. Narcissists work for a goal, too, but it's a different goal: they want power, authority, and adulation. Lacking empathy, and lacking also context and affect, narcissists don't understand how people achieve glory and high standing; they think it's all arbitrary, it's all appearances, it's all who you know. So they try to attach themselves to people who already have what they want, meanwhile making a great show of working hard. Narcissists can put in a shocking amount of time to very little effect. This is partly because they have so little empathy that they don't know why some work is valued more highly than other work, why some people's opinions carry more weight than others'. They do know that you're supposed to work and not be lazy, so they keep themselves occupied. But they are not invested in the work they do— whatever they may produce is just something they have to do to get the admiration and power they crave. Since this is so, they really don't pay attention to what they're doing, preferring the easiest thing at every turn, even though they may be constantly occupied, so that narcissists manage to be workaholics and extremely lazy at the same time. Narcissists measure the worth of their work only by how much time they spend on it, not by what they produce. They want to get an A for Effort. Narcissists lack empathy, so they don't know what others value or why. Narcissists tend to value things in quantitative ways and in odd quantities at that— they'll tell you how many inches of letters they received, but not how many letters or from how many correspondents; they know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

"A narcissist may, in fact, hold himself to a grinding work schedule that gives him something like an addictive high so that, when wrought up, he can be sort of dazed, giddy, and groggy, making you wonder if he's drunk or otherwise intoxicated— now, that's a real workaholic. Usually, this excessive busyness appears to be— and some will even tell you this— an attempt to distract themselves from unpleasant or inconvenient feelings (i.e., it's a manic defence against depression— and, note, with narcissists it's inaccurate to use "happy" or "unhappy" because their feelings are just not that differentiated; "euphoria" or "dysphoria" are as close as they get to ordinary pleasure or distress) or to make themselves unavailable to others' emotional needs." (Ashmun)

Use of Money: The narcissist pastor is very concerned about his own money, about tithing, and about having money to spend when he wants to:

"Some narcissists spend extravagantly in order to impress people, keep up grandiose pretensions, or buy favourable treatment, and some narcissists overspend, bankrupt themselves, and lose everything. *[Note: Thrift is not in itself a narcissistic trait; neither is a fondness for old clothes. The important element here is that the narcissist buys clothes that other people she admires and*

wishes to emulate have already picked out, since she has no individual tastes or preferences.]

These are people who need labels or trademarks (or other signs of authority) to distinguish between the real thing and a cheap knock-off or imitation, and so will substitute something easy and cheap for something precious and dear and expect nobody else to know the difference, since they can't. These are people who can tell you how many miles but not how many smiles.

“This is precisely why narcissists appear, at times, to be outstanding altruists. They enjoy the sense of power which goes with giving. They feel superior when they are needed. They encourage dependence of any kind. “ (Vaknin)

“You will remember that the narcissist's need for attention, power, etc., are primary avenues of experiencing himself as a self. Therefore, money is frequently experienced as a “self-object,” meaning that it has for all practical purposes the significance of being as important to him as his arm or leg.” (Payson, p. 26)

Focus on Power: The narcissist is particularly concerned with power– who has it, how can he get it, and how can he control it.

“Power is the perfect antidote for shame, and the Narcissist sees power as his due. There is no internal struggle between self-interest and empathy for others to block his path, so only a lack of gifts or ambition will limit him. The Narcissist, however, must be ever wary of envious rivals and protective of his turf. Watch him and see how he maintains control, not only of his sphere of influence but also over the spectres of powerlessness, humiliation, envy, and void that haunt him from within. If you play in his game, know what you are up against.” (Hotchkiss, p. 141)

Sarcasm: Expect to receive sarcastic comments and backhanded remarks all the time. If you want a snotty response, try not doing something you have been asked to do.

“Narcissists are noted for their negative, pessimistic, cynical, or gloomy outlook on life. Sarcasm seems to be a narcissistic specialty, not to mention spite. Lacking love and pleasure, they don't have a good reason for anything they do and they think everyone else is just like them, except they're honest and the rest of us are hypocrites. Nothing real is ever perfect enough to satisfy them, so are they are constantly complaining and criticizing– to the point of verbal abuse and insult.” (Ashmun)

“Narcissists constantly dump– or project– unwanted parts of themselves onto other people. They then begin to behave as if others possess these unwanted pieces of themselves, and they may even succeed in getting others to feel as if they actually have those traits or feelings.” (Hotchkiss, p. 64)

Impulsivity: This was the first thing that I noticed when I first met a bona fide narcissist. I was doing some construction which involved many stages of work. The narcissist was continually asking for certain things to be done right away, “Are you going to do this today?, tomorrow?”, over and over again. Of course everything in construction hinges on other things being done first. He couldn't really see that and was constantly consumed with certain parts of the finished product.

“Narcissists are impulsive. They undo themselves by behaviour that seems oddly stupid for people as intelligent as they are. Somehow, they don’t consider the probable consequences of their actions. It’s not clear to me whether they just expect to get away with doing anything they feel like at the moment or whether this impulsiveness is essentially a cognitive shortcoming deriving from the static psychic state with its distorted perception of time.” (Ashmun)

“Narcissists cannot delay gratification. They are creatures of the here and now, because they feel boundlessly entitled. Money is not the narcissist’s only compulsion. Many narcissists are inordinately orderly and clean, or they may be addicted to knowledge, or obsessed with time. He enforces his brand of compulsive orderliness and his code of conduct on his entire physical space in the most tyrannical manner.” (Vaknin)

Territorial: The narcissistic pastor will enjoy flowing through the people and receiving the adulation, respect, etc., but he will not want to be counted as one of the people, or a member of the team. He may hate potlucks or other events which would draw him down to the level of others.

“The narcissist adopts a physical posture which implies and exudes an air of superiority, seniority, hidden powers, mysteriousness, amused indifference, etc. Though the narcissist usually maintains sustained and piercing eye contact, he often refrains from physical proximity (he is “territorial”). The narcissist takes part in social interactions— even mere banter— condescendingly, from a position of supremacy and faux “magnanimity and largesse”. But he rarely mingles socially and prefers to remain the “observer” or the “lone wolf”. (Vaknin)

Entitlement. Spend a few days with a narcissist out and about and you will quickly identify this trait:

“The narcissist immediately asks for ‘special treatment’ of some kind. Not to wait his turn, to have a longer or a shorter therapeutic session, to talk directly to authority figures (and not to their assistants or secretaries), to be granted special payment terms, to enjoy custom tailored arrangements— or to get served first. The narcissist is the one who— vocally and demonstratively— demands the undivided attention of the head waiter in a restaurant, or monopolizes the hostess, or latches on to celebrities in a party. The narcissist reacts with rage and indignantly when denied his wishes and if treated equally with others whom he deems inferior.” (Vaknin)

“In social situations, you will talk about them or what they are interested in because they are more important, more knowledgeable, or more captivating than anyone else. Any other subject is boring and won’t hold their interest, and, in their eyes, they most certainly have a right to be entertained. In personal relationships, their sense of entitlement means that you must attend to their needs but they are under no obligation to listen to or understand you. If you insist that they do, you are ‘being difficult’ or challenging their rights. How dare you put yourself before me? they seem to (or more actually) ask. And if they have real power over you, they feel entitled to use you as they see fit, and you must not question their authority. Any failure to comply will be considered an attack on their superiority. Defiance of their will is a narcissistic injury that can trigger rage and self-righteous aggression.” (Hotchkiss p. 20)

“You may remember that the narcissist essentially experiences and understands others as if they were an extension of his own self. He therefore, feels entitled to what you have to offer without concern for true reciprocal exchange on his part. This inability to recognize the boundary of you as a free agent with your own ideas, feelings, and desires, along with his intensely felt sense of entitlement, are the powerful forces at work behind the scenes in virtually every interaction.” (Payson, p. 36)

How to Survive In Relationship with a Narcissist.

Sam Vaknin writes,

“It is possible to have a relatively smooth relationship with a narcissist, and it’s possible to maintain it for a long time. The first requirement for this, though, is distance: this simply cannot be done with a narcissist you live with. Given distance, or only transient and intermittent contact, you can get along with narcissists by treating them as infants: you give them whatever they want or need whenever they ask and do not expect any reciprocation at all, do not expect them to show the slightest interest in you or your life (or even in why you’re bothering with them at all), do not expect them to be able to do anything that you need or want, do not expect them to apologize or make amends or show any consideration for your feelings, do not expect them to take ordinary responsibility in any way. But note: they are not infants; infants develop and mature and require this kind of care for only a brief period, after which they are on the road to autonomy and looking after themselves, whereas narcissists never outgrow their demands for dedicated attention to their infantile needs 168 hours a week. Adult narcissists can be as demanding of your time and energy as little babies but without the gratification of their growing or learning anything from what they suck from you. Babies love you back, but adult narcissists are like vampires: they will take all you can give while giving nothing back, then curse you for running dry and discard you as a waste of their precious time. It is also essential that you keep emotional distance from narcissists.”

So what are other church workers and leaders to do when the pastor is a narcissist? First of all it is important to realize what the work environment will be like for the staff, particularly those who are the closest to, and have to work most intimately with the Narcissist Pastor. The overwhelming needs of the narcissist will eventually deplete the energies of the healthiest staff. Sandy Hotchkiss, writes that there are eight characteristics of the narcissist in power that must be taken into consideration::

“...when the person at the helm is an emotional toddler, the work environment can become toxic. Fear, mistrust, and exhaustion make life miserable for everyone, interfering with both morale and productivity....

1. Poor Interpersonal Boundaries – Equilibrium for narcissists is a state of fusion with others who have something they need. Whether the narcissist deliberately sets out to undermine your autonomy or just ignores your separate existence, that predisposition to fusion means that you will not only be expected to do what the Narcissist wants but also to know what that is, to want it yourself, and – this is important – to be able to produce it.... If the narcissist wants you for something, you become an extension of her Self, like an extra arm on her body. She may flatter you, offer you rewards, or otherwise try to seduce you to get you into her web. If she already has

power over you, she may shame or manipulate you to keep you under her thumb. Her goal is to annihilate the boundaries between you, to own you, as it were. Separateness will be viewed as a threat, and you will experience repeated violations of your personal boundaries.... Personal boundaries are seen as an obstacle to complete control and are routinely violated.

2. **Shame-dumping and Scapegoating**

3. **The Grand Vision** – ...[I]n a toxic environment, the source of this ‘grand vision’ is often the narcissistic leader’s personal ambition to make fantasies of perfection come true by whipping subordinated into a frenzy of productivity. In such workplaces, people’s private lives are cannibalized in the service of The Dream, and it is not unusual to see people putting in surreally long hours, sacrificing weekends and vacations, and coming to work sick.... This is not just the need to get the job done. Often the very nature of the job has been redefined in perfectionistic terms by the narcissistic leader....

4. **The Idealisation of the Useful** – ...[T]he fair haired one somehow functions to make the boss look or feel more pumped up. The modestly skilled secretary who becomes a personal assistant or confidant to the boss is often a love interest, in fact or in fantasy, or has a special talent for soothing ruffled feathers or reflecting glory.

5. **Shameless Exploitation** – The narcissistic leader is typically single-minded in the pursuit of power and recognition for specialness and feels entitled to these rewards. Deception, distortion, and seduction are among the tools of the trade, to be used without compunction whenever needed. The only shame is failure, and nothing, least of all empathy for subordinates, stands in the Narcissist’s way.

6. **Mood swings from Elation to Rage**

7. **Envy** – ...is a common feeling among Narcissists, who are keenly sensitive to potential shifts in the balance of power. Envy is often expressed in put-downs or competitive one-upmanship but may also be the driving force behind excessive praise. By showing contempt, the envious demean that which makes them feel diminished. By competing, they strive to capture what is desired for their own while elevating themselves at another’s expense. Insincere praise is a way of denying contemptuous feelings to oneself and others, as well as avoiding the shame that feeling envious evokes.

8. **Admiration-Seeking** – On the other end of the same continuum from envy is the narcissistic leader’s need to feel admired, which is nothing more than the craving to narcissistic supplies.... Sensitive underlings who wish to stay in the master’s good graces learn to intuit when a “Bravo” is needed. (Hotchkiss pp. 142-150)

Sow how to you survive the narcissist and protect the church? Here are some suggestions:

Hotchkiss suggests that a priority is to understand the narcissist and embrace the reality of what you are dealing with:

“Know the Narcissist’s weakness, the fragile Self beneath the mask of superiority and power. Become sensitive to what triggers his or her shame and envy. Learn to read the meaning behind

the grandiosity, arrogance, need for admiration, entitlement, contempt, and rage. Then treat the Narcissist as you would a small, vulnerable child – but with twice the respect. Be careful not to do anything that offends or challenges the Narcissist’s images or illusions. Remember that he or she is not interested in truth, reality, or you.” (p. 155)

Realize that a narcissistic pastor is a very real danger both to himself and to the church life. According to Dattner Consulting, LLC, if the NPD pastor is able to accumulate too much power and prestige, and if others in the church are not able to moderate the narcissist’s destructive impulses, success can soon lead to failure. In the narcissist’s quest to maintain and promote their fragile self-esteem, the NPD pastor can often ignore or deny reality when it presents itself. They will also exploit the organization in order to attain their own goals. Grandiosity can lead to too much risk taking, and fear of failure can, at other times, lead to too little risk. With this in mind it becomes necessary to establish appropriate boundaries around the areas of finance, relational power over other staff, the board, and other leaders appointed by the congregation. Unfortunately fear is the main deterrent to the narcissist— fear of losing his reputation, and fear of consequences which are clearly delineated and carried out when necessary.

Another key is to surround the narcissist with other leaders who are capable and confident and are willing to disagree with the NPD pastor. There needs to be continuous monitoring of the risks that the narcissist is taking. Unrealistic grandiose plans needs to be quickly squashed before others get caught up in them. Because the narcissist is only concerned with the here and now, expenditures that have immediate short term costs but long term benefits and/or cost savings needs to be encouraged. Rational long term planning is a shortfall of the narcissist, therefore this process must be encouraged. Again he will need other leaders around him for this to work at all. Realize that image is everything and exorbitant cost can be run up in unnecessary areas such as flashy bulletins and advertising, excess costs in dolling up the building and grounds etc.— anything which presents a “higher class, professional image.” Narcissists believe that just because they want something— that is reason enough for them to have it— and not tomorrow— “today, now.”

Dattner also points out that the NPD leader will tend to select and defer to loyal and uncritical staff. Loyalty will be valued far more than truth speaking. The narcissistic pastor will attempt to stack the board, the elders or committees that he has to deal with, with people who he perceives as loyal, no matter how incompetent they may be, particularly if they are seen as one of the special people (the rich, the educated, etc.). He will often try to veto or block anyone who he perceives as challenging to their getting their own way. Of particular interest to the narcissist is the gullible— those who will believe in the narcissist in spite of lack of evidence— those who will believe the big wild plans and see themselves benefiting as well. Gullible needy people who will praise and be loyal are the ideal “surround sound” for the narcissist.

Recognize that the narcissist will be generally unwilling to seek out or accept feedback, and may even throw tantrums if they are questioned or criticized. Dattner recommends that incentives be given around the areas of giving and learning from feedback. As much as possible, to avoid major incident, feedback needs to be given in ‘indirect or non-threatening’ ways. The narcissist is vulnerable to the most negligible slights and is prone to withdraw and become inaccessible, feeling offended.

Realise that the narcissist has shifting values and what is good to him at one moment is not the next— everything hinges upon what they feel is best for them at the time. It is extremely hard to get a narcissistic pastor to create long term rules (policies and procedures/flow charts of authority etc) as they would much rather autocratically make decisions arbitrarily and not have any restrictions placed upon themselves. They will just wish to pleasure those who are loyal and make them look good, and punish all who they feel who do not. It therefore becomes important for the church leadership to make sure that policies and procedures get put in place, and that these are then followed. Again it will be important to make sure strong leaders are involved in setting these policies and then get these in writing and distributed accordingly.

The core leadership of the church needs to understand, and accept the fact, that the narcissists behavior and self-reports are unreliable. The narcissists cognition is so impaired that he/she will misinterpret others speech, actions and intentions. Often, they will twist things to fit into their fantasies and subjective realities. During board meetings, elder meetings, etc., it becomes imperative that when things are said that somehow do not sit right, that there be follow-up and confirmation of “past conversations, or intentions and plans of other people” reported by the narcissist. In many cases you will find that there has been gross misrepresentation and flat out lies to cover things up and avoid responsibility. The narcissist is commonly capable of describing things so far removed from how they really were that you wonder if the narcissist was really there at all.

It cannot be mentioned too many times that issues will arise over the narcissist’s inability to empathize with others. The NPD pastor will make an absolutely horrible counsellor leaving counselees feeling misunderstood and uncared for. Couples getting married in the church will wonder if the pastor even cares the slightest about the needs and wishes of the couple regarding the wedding ceremony and festivities. The narcissistic pastor finds that it is really hard to give away the spot light to someone else, particularly on his own platform. Funerals and weddings can be seen as another platform on which to perform. In general most church members are seen by the narcissist pastor as objects that have neither feelings nor needs. When you combine this perspective with his exaggerated sense of entitlement you will see the exploitation of others with little guilt or remorse. Those most devastated will be those who pour themselves into a task wanting to please the pastor, and then are sharply criticized for every minute failing or error. Particularly vulnerable will be all those members who are involved with any “front ministries” of the church— those areas that are visual and are seen. These could include those who prepare bulletins, do overheads of VPM ministry, do cleanup or decorate, do drama, music, etc. Generally it will never be done good enough or up to the standards of “the superior individual who deserves the best.”

For the most part the narcissist will not show their emotions, but that does not mean that they do not experience them. The narcissist is particularly haunted by criticism and defeats. But rather than deal with these emotions as most people do, they will rather repress them so deeply that they play no role in their conscious behavior. When the narcissist feels he has experienced injury he will begin to experience feelings of emptiness, degradation and humiliation and he can react with either depression or narcissistic rage. The rage will manifest itself most often in talking about others with disdain and through backhanded attacks. Consistent attacks will be made to discredit key individuals, and to separate other individuals and groups from one another, in an effort to maintain power and control. If the narcissist feels someone else is attempting to

diminish his sense of superiority he will attack and attempt to destroy the source of criticism. Again it is important that the different parties in the church do not take at face value what has been said about other groups or individuals in the church. Check things back to their source.

The bedrock of the narcissistic pastors is their belief of their own personal superiority. Somehow this individual believes that their presumption of superiority is sufficient proof of it. If they are feeling good about themselves this proves how good they are. Negative aspects of self are generally met with denial or rationalization. Don't expect this pastor to acknowledge shortcomings or negative feedback from any group or the congregation at large. Rather expect him/her to diminish and discredit everything that doesn't fit into his own view of reality. Congregation surveys or even verifiable and statistically significant research will be ignored. This sense of superiority results in the narcissist's belief that others should always defer to them. Whatever issue the narcissist decides he wants to focus on or make a decision on, it will be irrelevant who has been responsible for that decision in the past. Lines of authority are irrelevant below him. Empowerment of others to make decisions is given and taken away at whim. Empowerment for the most part is not an understandable concept. Often the narcissist will go out of his way to override another's decisions just to prove who really is in charge, particularly if he feels it will please some other authority figure or someone he is trying to con. More often than not this disempowerment will be done behind the others back and then blamed on someone else in the continual divide and conquer process. Again it behoves the church leadership to get authority lines, job descriptions etc. firmly in order and maintained so there are fewer abuses, though the narcissist pastor will circumvent these rules whenever he thinks he can get away with it to suit his needs. (I personally know of one staff member of a church who was given the job description by the senior pastor of "Your job description is to make me look good!" That was all it said. When questioned by the board he produced a lengthy job description written by the staff member, and pawned it off as if he himself had written it. In reality that is all any staff member will be evaluated by the narcissistic pastor).

The NPD pastor will most likely will not have any true idea of what motives others around them. This is due to their inability to empathize, or to look beyond their own interests. It is therefore imperative that the leadership of the church, once it realizes that it has a narcissist at the helm, become very proactive at looking out for the needs of other staff in particular. Realize that staff meetings and other training times may be simply a complete waste of time as there is no understanding of what others want or need. Staff incentives need to be carefully monitored. Often the reward punishment cycle of the narcissistic leader is based on emotional whim, and what is perceived as best for himself, not the organization or the other staff members. Staff will often be valued on how much emotional comfort and emotional stability they can provide to the pastor. The narcissist will rarely give their staffs "voice"—the opportunity to air grievances, or express wants and needs. If this is not understood and controlled, there is a high likelihood that the rest of the staff will eventually become disillusioned and begin operating in less than functional ways. Some staff may develop stress induced illnesses, particularly those who have to work most closely with the narcissist. A common symptom of those who try to work along side narcissists (particularly those individuals with strong values and/or good consciences) is continuous anger. It eventually becomes too much— continual criticism, illogical processes, etc., etc. Daily encounters with the narcissist will be dreaded. The overly responsible will suffer burn out as they discover that they really "cannot put the fires out fast enough— they can't cover for the narcissist enough". Eventually the anxiety and anger will take its toll and stress induced

illness will manifest. At this point it will become abundantly clear that the narcissist really doesn't care about them— just about what they were able to do. For some this can be a crushing blow. Some authors describe the continual interaction with a narcissist as creating some of the same symptoms as post-traumatic stress disorder—particularly headaches and anxiety. Those at greatest risk will be staff members who have suffered abuse in their own childhood and get sucked into trying to please the narcissist in ways they tried to please their dysfunctional parent.

“The victim of a narcissist is traumatized. There are biochemical changes in the body and structural changes in the brain. Thought patterns change, memories are lost, immune system strongly affected, brain cells die, there is chest pain, muscle pain, feelings are intense and emotions chaotic. Victimization is never deserved.” (Bradley)

The stress created can not be underemphasized. The long term result to the organization of the church is a destructive downward process that can have a spiralling effect as key leaders disappear, leadership functions fall away, and attrition begins to snowball. Other people become swept up in the carnage and suddenly the church finds itself in serious problem. What has been previously built will die or move away. In order to head this off, checks and balances must be put into place early, and continuous oversight undertaken. Dattner recommends that fairness judgment processes be utilized in 360 degree feedback to maintain perspective of how staff are surviving. I believe this should also be extended to key leaders where ever they are found in the church.

In an online interview, David Roberts of Healthyplace.com interviewed Dr. Sam Vaknin about the narcissist in the workplace. Here is a small part of the interchange:

David: “So, in the beginning, you are saying they will get on your good side by charming you and pretending to be interested in you and what you’re doing. Later, what kind of behaviours should a person expect from the: (1) narcissistic boss and (2) colleague? And I’m assuming here that the behaviours for the two might be different.”

Dr. Vaknin: “Workplace narcissists seethe with anger and resentment. The gap between reality and their grandiose flights of fancy (the ‘grandiosity gap’) is so great that they develop persecutory delusions, resentment and rage. They are also extremely and pathologically envious, seeking to destroy what they perceive to be the sources of their constant frustration: a popular co-worker, a successful boss, a qualified or skilled employee. Narcissists at work crave constant attention and will go to great lengths to secure it – including by ‘engineering’ situations that place them at the centre. They are immature, constantly nagging and complaining, finding fault with everyone and everything, Cassandras who constantly predict impending doom. They are intrusive and invasive. They firmly believe in their own omnipotence and omniscience. They feel entitled to special treatment and are convinced that they are above Man-made laws, including the rules of their place of employment. They are very disruptive, poor team members, can rarely collaborate with others without being cantankerous and quarrelsome. They are control freaks and feel the compulsive and irresistible urge to interfere in everything to micromanage and overrule others. All in all, a highly unpleasant experience.”

David: “If you work with or under a narcissist, it sounds like your work life might be a living hell.”

Dr. Vaknin: “You would never forget it. It is traumatic and very likely to end in actual bullying and stalking behaviours. Many workers end up with PTSD- Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Others quit, or even relocate.”

David: “What kind of individual, personality-wise, is best suited to work with a narcissist co-worker or boss?”

Dr. Vaknin: “Certain pathological personalities- for instance, someone with a Dependent Personality Disorder- or an Inverted Narcissist may get along just fine. A submissive person whose expectations are limited, moods are subdued and willingness to absorb abuse is extended would survive with a narcissist, or even thrive in such an environment. But the vast majority of workers are likely to suffer ill-health effects, clash with the narcissist, or end up being sacked, reassigned, relocated, or demoted. The narcissistic bully very often gets his way: He gets promoted, the ideas he “adopted” become corporate policy, his misdeeds are overlooked, his misbehaviour tolerated. This is partly because, as I said earlier, narcissists are excellent liars with considerable thespian skills- and partly because no one wants to mess around with a thug, even if his thuggery is limited to words and gestures.”

Around the Board Table

So what can you expect in board meetings, or elder’s meetings, etc.? Dr. Bruce Gregory, a corporate behaviour specialist, writes:

“The narcissistic defence seeks to dominate every space in which it participates– both on individual and group levels. This force of narcissism is interested in, committed to, and obsessed with power and control, and it will sacrifice people and resources indiscriminately. The narcissistic defence interferes by stonewalling, intimidating, and dominating attention in group settings.

“Narcissism is distinguished from true leadership (which shares attention) by narcissism’s use, abuse and exploitation of people, as opposed to enhancing and facilitating the value of others. Sustainability is dependent on collaborative, mutually-complementary group efforts that seek to maximize benefits for the largest amount of people without exploiting each other or the integrity of the environment. This is offensive to narcissism because it is in direct contradiction to narcissism’s values of dominance, exploitation and control.

“So what does narcissism do in the presence of sustainability proponents? It resists. It resists in a methodical, calculated way toward the end of distracting, derailing, or simply stopping whatever program the sustainability contingent is seeking to implement. Character assassination, misinformation, and blocking access to funding and other resources are commonly employed methods.

“...many people have the fantasy that if they try hard, ‘do it right,’ be reasonable, logical, and have goodwill and a team approach, these factors will generate a positive outcome in interpersonal or group settings. This is about as deep a fantasy as one could possibly have, as it is not based in reality. Why is this? It is not based in reality because a narcissist survival is dependent on having control, or the perception of control. When a narcissist’s control is challenged (and this is what efforts toward sustainability do by definition), he becomes

threatened, and responds like his survival is at stake, transforming the environment into a veritable jungle. This is not the friendly environment of Mr. Rogers' neighborhood!

“Another factor which reinforces the stranglehold narcissism can have is when people are committed to being ‘nice’ or fair, and as a result are unwilling or unprepared to hold the narcissist accountable for positions or behaviours. Finally, an unwillingness to ‘go for the throat,’ as champions do in sporting events, only allows narcissism to recycle and feed off its commitment to domination.

“When the narcissistic defence is operating in an interpersonal or group setting, the grandiose part does not show its face in public. In public it presents a front of patience, congeniality, and confident reasonableness. However, beneath the surface it is supremely smug and superior. It is confident it can deceive the ‘fools’ or their objective it is committed to blocking, while maintaining its own control and dominance over either the rules, and/or the flow of events.

“One of the best places to spot narcissism, unfortunately, is at the top of a company or a public organization. The narcissism can be detected by being sensitive to resistance from the top. The top, or the person or persons at the top, will resist efforts toward change in process or structure. The resistance is communicated through a variety of techniques: always needing more information, appearing confused or having a lack of clarity; excuses; premeditated “blowups” or other distractions from whatever the issues being considered. A common example is as follows: a position needs to be filled in order for an important project to move forward. The boss, preferring control over progress and efficiency, delays and delays the hiring of the new executive, consistently finding something wrong with either the candidates or the search firm.

“Another common sign of narcissism is the experience of pressure. This pressure comes from the unrelenting demand for perfection which is necessary to the narcissism if the grandiosity and illusion of omnipotence is to be maintained. The employee or group member will feel pressure either to conform, or to continue producing until exhaustion. The pressure is unpleasant and contains the negative expectation that people can't meet objectives through their own resources and cooperative participation without pressure from above. It devalues pride of accomplishment, commitment, and capacity to follow through and complete tasks.

“When narcissism perceives that it could lose control of a situation or process, it often feels threatened. The grandiosity's sense of omnipotence is being threatened. When this happens, narcissism's response can be one of character assassination of those who are threatening its objectives. The presence of character assassination is another way of detecting the presence of narcissism.

“Narcissistic forces are also critical; they can be harsh in their judgments of anything short of perfection. They can be bullying and abusive in their verbal criticism, daring others to challenge their destructive communication tactics. Their underlying message contains some or all of the following: ‘I can intimidate you anytime I want. You are afraid to stand up to me, to challenge me. You are weak and spineless. Sometimes I will say something that I know is completely untrue or bullshit just to prove that you won't challenge me.’ Intimidation is used like a large boulder on a mountain road, saying ‘deal with me, or go down the mountain, and forget going ahead. I am the roadblock through which you must go.’

“Skills for dealing with attempts to intimidate can be divided into two areas, interpersonal and interpersonal. Interpersonally, it is essential not to react. This means that reactions of fear, impatience, or anger are not practical. In their place should be patience and curiosity. On an interpersonal level, responses and questions like, “that’s interesting; could you explain that? Or, ‘I am not clear about that; would you please clarify (or elaborate)?’ Or, ‘it seems like there is a contradiction in your logic.’ All of these can generate positive results in terms of reducing the control of the narcissistic forces. This is done through the non-reaction, which communicates, “you are not so powerful that you can manipulate me, or us, and distract us from the issue. It is also done through the questions which communicate, ‘I/we are not afraid of you; we are not leaving the space/situation to your control alone; we will challenge you if necessary; you cannot win through intimidation or disinformation.’

“Accountability skills are another important tool in the sustainability advocate’s arsenal. Accountability skills, used in group settings, are extremely educational to promote awareness regarding the dynamics of power. Accountability skills reduce the tendency to be a victim, and provide inspiration and support for persons looking for the courage to successfully challenge narcissistic forces. Accountability creates ‘space’ by obligating narcissistic forces to substantiate positions, communication and behaviour. Accountability skills generate the conditions that require narcissistic forces to take responsibility for their intent or give up their position.

“Questions like the following are the medium for accountability skills:

How did you come to your decision/position?

What factors influenced your decision?

Have you considered the possibility that you are contradicting yourself?

Have you considered that you have avoided considering some important factors?

Can you clarify your intent and how it includes the following factors (e.g. your lack of accurate information/your resistance/your unwarranted/excessive criticism (which is actually character assassination)?” (Gregory)

Do not think that because the narcissistic pastor says he will do something by the next meeting that it will be done. This is often a stall tactic. Often things will be stalled until they are forgotten about. Don’t allow this to happen. Make sure that the urgent and important things stay on the agenda, and mete out consequences when things are not done.

“Another manipulative behaviour on the part of the narcissist is a continuous ingenuity for creating a sense of distraction. While distraction can be positive or negative, you may notice an ongoing ability for the NPD person to defocus you or those around you from the intended agenda. For instance, just when a board of directors might be ready to discuss the implementation of an agreed plan, the NPD person raises a new issue and the subject at hand stalls out. This power to distract may be facilitated through humour, shifting the topic, making catastrophic predictions, subtly pitting individuals against one another, creating an atmosphere of distrust, or simply asserting a last minute change of mind, etc. Meanwhile, the NPD person is jockeying for position in the moment when he can take over the program and gain control....

Distraction dynamics are often a defensive reaction on the part of the NPD person to avoid an issue that he or she would rather not address. Defocusing the subject by bringing up a counter complaint is probably the most common form of distraction. If you are not prepared and ready to stay calm and firmly stand your ground, you will quickly be pulled into the escalation of action-reaction.... For the NPD person, the most common distraction is to immediately bring the subject back to herself and change the focus to a different issue. The ‘broken record’ technique is particularly effective when encountering the distraction dynamic.

“At other times, when you are simply sharing your thoughts about a subject of interest, the NPD individual may begin sharing something so unrelated that you wonder if you fell down the rabbit hole in Alice’s wonderland. In addition, humour that has a quality of absurdity is another form of distraction that often occurs to distance you, not allowing you the opportunity to share feelings about something you care about.” (Payson, p. 41-42)

The core leadership must realize, and this is especially true in larger churches, that the general congregant will be completely unaware of who and what the pastor really is. They may get small glimpses here and there leaving them a little confused, but generally they will accord honour and trust to the position of pastor in spite of the true character. There will of course be those moments when the pastor says things from the pulpit that will greatly offend different groups within the church. You should understand by now that he won’t understand or even recognize what he has said or done, because he will not understand the “emotional content or context” because that is not his world. Be prepared to do damage control and put in place a good follow-up program for those who stop attending or voice displeasure. Realize that eventually the concept of “seeker-sensitive” cannot work with a narcissist behind the pulpit. Almost every group of people “beneath” him will be referred to in derogatory ways.

Also realize that the staff, particularly those who work most closely with the narcissist, have been taken in and ensnared. You need to gently coax them that they are in a safe place and will be protected as they share about what they have experienced. The most common fear that they will have as they try to detangle themselves is that their efforts to change the situation with the Narcissist will be the cause of his catastrophic self-destruction. They are aware as well of the Narcissist’s capacity for rage, but also of his deep vulnerability. While not spoken of they are aware as well of his deep wounding, and they do not want to wound him any further – hence they are often trapped. In speaking about the inner turmoil a person goes through in attempting to detangle oneself, Payson writes:

“You can’t imagine the guilt you would feel if your actions precipitate his deterioration. The dilemma for you has become a growing awareness that survival is coming down to him or you. Serious symptoms for you may range from depression, chronic anger, stress related illnesses, or using escape mechanisms such as compulsive or addictive behaviors.” (p. 52)

Payson further writes about specific things that staff must do to avoid being overwhelmed and destroyed by the narcissist:

“Consequently, you must achieve a bottom line of boundary setting ability with his person. This is essential if you are going to prevent problems or defend yourself effectively from the NPD co-worker, or worse yet the NPD boss. Along with protecting yourself from hurt, exploitation, or

betrayal, we are also now talking about self-preservation in terms of your career.... In this circumstance, it is time for nothing less than learning the basics of survival.... Begin to set limits on the amount of time you are willing to listen to your NPD colleague, and become more sparing in your praise and support. Identify and rehearse phrases that offer you a graceful exit from conversations of meetings. Pressing deadlines, important phone calls, even a restroom necessity can be assertive strategies to help you to limit your exposure to the NPD individual.... Memos highlighting new decisions are also safety mechanisms, as well as memos summarizing discussions you had with your boss on matters relevant to your performance. These are public records, and you will want to send a copy to all individuals concerned. Two things are automatically taken care of here: 1). You clear up any misunderstandings that may have occurred by creating an accountability system for communication. 2). You will surface and/or mitigate any resistance on your boss's part to clearly state his or her expectations of you. You may remember that the NPD individual is often engaged in sending double messages that keep you off balance, such as changing the rules in midstream while acting as if you had already been informed. The memo system is a good habit to get into for the sake of surfacing this problem before rather than after your job is in jeopardy.... I do not want to mislead you here. If you have an NPD employer who is threatened by you and/or is making your life miserable, you may only be, at best, in a position to implement damage control. You may not be able to prevent the inevitable conclusion that you must find another position or another job altogether. However, you will feel much better about yourself afterwards, if you exercise more control over what unfolds.” (p. 148-150)

- Set limits on listening time and rehearse exit strategies
- Limit praise and support
- Limit offering your expertise and ideas beyond what is necessary
- Prepare for change-back defences through mental and emotional rehearsal
- Be alert to your guilt response and maintain your self-preservation measures
- Find a “safe” outside support person who you can talk to
- Keep a daily log of your work activities
- Write memos of all meetings, changes to plans, or matters related to your performance
- Send copies to other people involved
- When under threat of the NPD person's devaluing agenda have a third party present at all significant interactions
- Find another position if necessary, preferably before being fired
- Be proactive (Payson, p.163)

The leadership's responsibility is to ensure that staff are not destroyed and to deal with things sooner or later.

Receiving praise is the cornerstone of the narcissist's behaviour. In order to pacify and mollify tense situations it may be necessary to provide positive feedback etc. in order to rejuvenate the narcissist, and derail a damaging confrontation. Helping him/her feel good about himself may short circuit a tantrum or counter attack, but this is not a long term solution.

Sam Vaknin writes:

“The narcissistic leader must be held accountable:

“Narcissists of all shades can usually control their behaviour and actions. They simply don't care to, they regard it as a waste of their precious time, or a humiliating chore. The narcissist feels both superior and entitled— regardless of his real gifts or achievements. Other people are inferior, his slaves, there to cater to his needs and make his existence seamless, flowing and smooth. The narcissist holds himself to be cosmically significant and thus entitled to the conditions needed to realise his talents and to successfully complete his mission (which changes fluidly and about which he has no clue except that it has to do with brilliance and fame)...

“He can tell right from wrong; He simply doesn't care about the other person sufficiently to refrain from action.

“Similarly, the narcissist cannot 'control' his grandiose fantasies. He firmly believes that they constitute an accurate representation of reality. But: He knows that lying is wrong and not done; He simply doesn't care enough about society and others to refrain from confabulating.

“To summarize, narcissists should be held accountable for most of their actions because they can tell wrong from right and they can refrain from acting. They simply don't care enough about others to put to good use these twin abilities. Others are not sufficiently important to dent the narcissist's indifference or to alter his abusive conduct.

“Narcissists dissemble, conspire, destroy and self-destruct. Their drive is compulsive; their vision rarely grounded in reality, their human relations a calamity. In the long run, there is no enduring benefit to dancing with narcissists – only ephemeral and, often, fallacious, 'achievements'.

“Nor is the narcissist deterred by possible punishment or regards himself subject to Man-made laws. His sense of entitlement coupled with the conviction of his own superiority lead him to believe in his invincibility, invulnerability, immunity, and divinity. The narcissist holds human edicts, rules, and regulations in disdain and human penalties in disdain. He regards human needs and emotions as weaknesses to be predatorily exploited.

“So convinced is the narcissist that he is destined to great things that he refuses to accept setbacks, failures and punishments. He regards them as temporary, as the outcomes of someone else's errors, as part of the future mythology of his rise to power/brilliance/wealth/ideal love, etc. Being punished is a diversion of his precious energy and resources from the all-important task of fulfilling his mission in life.

“The narcissist is pathologically envious of people and believes that they are equally envious of him. He is paranoid, on guard, ready to fend off an imminent attack. A punishment to the narcissist is a major surprise and a nuisance but it also validates his suspicion that he is being persecuted. It proves to him that strong forces are arrayed against him.

“He tells himself that people, envious of his achievements and humiliated by them, are out to get him. He constitutes a threat to the accepted order. When required to pay for his misdeeds, the narcissist is always disdainful and bitter and feels misunderstood by his inferiors.

“Cooked books, corporate fraud, bending the (GAAP or other) rules, sweeping problems under the carpet, over-promising, making grandiose claims (the ‘vision thing’) are hallmarks of a narcissist in action.

“Narcissists are incorrigibly and notoriously difficult to change. Thus, trying to ‘modify’ them is doomed to failure. You should either accept them as they are or avoid them altogether. If one accepts the narcissist as he is— one should cater to his needs. His needs are part of what he is. Would you have ignored a physical handicap? Would you not have assisted a quadriplegic? The narcissist is an emotional cripple. He needs constant adulation. He cannot help it. So, if one chooses to accept him— it is a package deal, all his needs included.” (Vaknin)

When the church has found itself deep in confusion and chaos because of the narcissist, do not blame the pastoral search committee. Narcissists are very misleading. They possess undeniable personal charm and can manifest an engaging intellect. Most people tend to associate these traits with maturity, authority and responsibility. Unfortunately, with the narcissist, realize that you have been had. The narcissist is a professional at forming expectations in other people— expectations that are based upon the “image” that the narcissist has of himself. Sadly there is lack of mature adult skills and the narcissist has to rely on others around himself for these deficiencies. Eventually hope and expectations are replaced with disappointment and frustration.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the church will most likely make an attempt to help the pastor, or curb excess by rules and boundaries, but these simply delays the inevitable. Sooner or later the leadership of the church must react and respond pragmatically or accept things they way they are and give the narcissist free reign. A decision has to be made weighing out the positive and negatives of keeping the narcissistic pastor in the pulpit. Personally, I believe it is a no-brainer, but in reality this may become a very difficult decision. It will be very hard for some to accept the evidence of what they see before them. Some others may be caught up in the benefits of aligning themselves with the narcissist and his plans, etc. In all the confusion, the greatest tool of the devil— that of causing disunity will rear its ugly head. Leadership must work at establishing unity and trust, particularly within itself, and then make the tough decision. It will be important to properly document the deficiencies as it related to absent skill sets that the pastor is lacking, as well as to list the abuses of power etc. that are being manifest. It would be prudent to as quickly as possible have a formal evaluation of the pastor done, and the notes entered into the personnel file in case there is the need for dismissal, and the pastor counters with a law suit. Make sure you have crossed all the t’s and dotted your i’s. When possible consult with your district leadership about proper process for dismissal. The best scenario is to convince the narcissist how it is in his best interests to resign and find other employment.

Trust is the critical foundation of any successful organization. Trust only grows in an environment in which individuals have character. If character is corrupt then perspective is distorted. This is clearly seen in the life of the narcissist. This distortion leads to mistrust. If you cannot trust the pastor, there will never be sustainable interpersonal relationships between pastor and staff and other leaders. This concept of character first is repeatedly reinforced in Scripture—qualifications for deacons and elders focus mainly on character—nothing to do with seminary education or anointing. Once there is the breakdown of trust the foundation is lost for the church to maintain biblical community. The concept of team is continually undermined. The net result is the effective witness of the church compromised.

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