

How to Identify a Narcissist Pastor

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(Source: Power2Serve Resources, The Church Law Campaign)

Following up from my last article 'Narcissism in the Pulpit', purpose of this article is not to label or pigeonhole pastors, but to rather provide understanding. People with NPD are people that are to be pitied, and people that need to be understood. Unfortunately they are also people that 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 or not you are supporting or not 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 to look out for:

1. Self-centered. His needs are paramount and take precedence over the church
2. No remorse for mistakes or misdeeds. Will not offer heartfelt apologies or ask for forgiveness.
3. Unreliable and undependable. Will change his mind and reverse decisions at will
4. Does not care about the consequences of his actions—may not even understand the connection
5. Projects his faults on to others. High blaming behavior; never his fault
6. Little if any conscience. Will do most anything he thinks will not be discovered. May ask staff to fudge the books.
7. Insensitive to needs and feelings of others
8. Has a good front (persona) to impress and exploit others
9. Low stress tolerance. Easy to provoke into anger
10. People are to be manipulated for his needs, accomplishing his desires
11. Rationalizes easily. Twists conversation to his gain at other's expense. If trapped, keeps talking, changes the subject or gets angry

12. Pathological lying. Will lie if he thinks it will further his image and if he doesn't think it will be discovered. When lies are followed up on will imply that the other person is mistaken, and that he never said the lie in the first place
13. Tremendous need to control situations, conversations, and group meetings
14. No real values. Mostly situational
15. Often perceived as caring and understanding and uses this to manipulate
16. Angry, rapidly changing moods
17. Does not share ideas, feelings, emotions
18. Conversation controller. Must have the first and last word
19. Is very slow to forgive others. Hangs onto resentment
20. Secret life. Hides money, friends, activities
21. Likes annoying and provoking others. Likes to create chaos and disrupt for no reason
22. Moody - switches from nice guy to anger without much provocation
23. Seldom expresses appreciation unless he is buttering the person up for further use
24. Grandiose. Convinced he knows more than others and is correct in all he does
25. Lacks ability to see how he comes across to others. Defensive when confronted with his behavior. Never his fault
26. Can get emotional, tearful. This is about show or frustration rather than sorrow
27. He breaks woman's spirits to keep them dependent
28. Needs threats, intimidations to keep others close to him
29. Highly contradictory
30. Convincing. Must convince people to side with him
31. Hides his real self. Always "on", playing the part when in public
32. Kind only if he's getting from you what he wants
33. He has to be right. He has to win. He has to look good
34. He announces, not discusses. He tells, not asks
35. Does not discuss openly, has a hidden agenda
36. Controls money of others but spends freely on himself
37. Unilateral condition of, "I'm OK and justified so I don't need to hear your position or ideas."
38. Always feels misunderstood
39. You feel miserable with this person. He drains you
40. Does not listen because he does not care
41. Is not interested in problem-solving
42. Very good at reading people, so he can manipulate them
43. Will exaggerate and brag about past accomplishments
44. Concerned with getting what he wants NOW—immediately
45. Will not want to share his pulpit/platform with others
46. Will be envious of any other staff person who is loved or highly respected by the congregation
47. Will be overly concerned with the 'image' of the church building/bulletins etc.
48. Feels that he has been taken advantage of over and over again—'knife in the back syndrome.'
49. Dress may change based on whomever is his latest idol
50. Spend long hours 'doing church', but little will be accomplished

51. Nit-picky about minute details, but miss the entire big picture

Additional characteristics known only to the narcissist's spouse:

1. Sabotages partner. Wants her to be happy only through him and to have few or no outside interests and acquaintances
2. His feelings are discussed, not the partners
3. Uses sex to control

If your pastor or someone else you know can be characterized by a majority of these realize you have a major challenge on your hands. This check list should be given to those who have had the closest continual contact with the narcissist. Take into consideration that some people whom the narcissist has surrounded himself with will be blind to all these, as they have either become co-dependent with the narcissist, or have blind loyalty to the 'position of pastor.'

Church Law Campaign strongly recommends to either leave such organizations, and/or seek help before it is too late.