

PASTORPEDIA™

Cutting Edge Conversations for Pastors and Church Leaders

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Hard Ethics and Cultural Questions for the Local Church

“Can’t find my seminary notes on that...”

Or on quite a few of the cultural and ethical subjects we all face or should face today. Who would’ve thought?

The pastor may not like the title chief executive officer of the church, even though he is, but we must also accept the responsibility of chief ethics officer. Surely the policies and ethical statements are part of what the oversight board creates, but the pastor is probably going to be the one to instigate this.

Can a staff member meet alone with someone from the opposite sex? How about sustained counseling? What constitutes sexual harassment or just plain inappropriate words or actions? Where do you report it and what good does it do?

Can you be a practicing heterosexual and join our church? Can a homosexual attend?

Can I push my pro or con Donald Trump views in our Sunday and home ABFs and groups? May I bring my rifle to church? Is it really wrong for a church to have a debt, as the group teacher implied last week?

Say that again about worship music and the kind God likes!

This month we tackle ethics and some of the questions of culture for the local church. We are all taking notes as we go!

Trying to stay above,

Knute, for Jeff and Jim

What are two or three of the hardest things you are facing now?

Jeff Bogue

- Where the church needs to stand with issues of sexual immorality, both heterosexual and homosexual, and what tones we take and how we interact with people who are struggling in all of those areas.
- The role that politics play in the church. Politics are dividing the country right now and that same division can easily creep into the local church — everything from our public statements to individuals within the church in conflict with each other over political issues.
- Self-aggrandizing — people being obsessed with themselves, often using the platform of social media. This can be on political issues, with “sexy selfies,” or wanting to make a name for themselves and promote themselves, maybe in inappropriate ways.

Jim Brown

- Gender confusion is prime, as our community is filled with LGBT concerns.
- Broken families, divorced families, and the children impacted by blended families. Helping families navigate through this challenging new season is important.
- All the competing things that pull families away from worshipping in a corporate way: sports, camping, road races, and school events. How to best navigate families through this season.

Knute Larson

- Issues of gender and sexuality, not only what to say to people who ask because they do not like the trends, but how to help parents facing tough calls, and how to respond to new people attending who prefer a different morality.
- Politics — so many cannot leave their views on the President or political parties outside the church. And of course some of the questions have connections to the Bible.

- Still the question of emphasis and mission mindset of the church people. All of my comments are related to churches now. A common denominator is how to turn the ship toward caring more about outsiders and the local community, not just continuing practices and foreign missions. This of course includes the mood of the service, the type of music and worship, and how people respond to new people.
- The “selfie” culture. Not just with photos!

We hate sin but love people — how does that show in the local church?

Jeff Bogue

- Through relationships. The church should stay far away from generalized statements, policies, procedures, and be sure to get into the lives and hearts of the people we are leading.
- When people are engaged in sin (e.g., they are living together, etc.) you really need to understand why they are making that choice. For instance, what I’ve found most of the time when young people are living together, is they are actually trying to avoid being divorced later. They are not trying to rebel against God.

They might not know the heart or mind of God or the Scriptures on those issues. A conversation and relationship with them, can explain that, then perhaps, I can help to lead them through it.

- Don’t elevate one sin over another. There are certain practices that are taboo in our culture that are not necessarily taboo in Scripture. We need to be careful that we define sin for what it is. Then we can lead people through it without being overly critical of one person’s struggle or temptation over another’s.
- Do all of this through patience and pastoring — patiently understanding a person, pastoring them to a solution, and loving them through their process of becoming who God has called them to be.

Jim Brown

- Understanding that there is a time, place, and forum to properly address the sin issues. “Turn or burn” is never the best way.
- Grace and truth work best when navigating through these issues.
- If people know that you love them and have no agenda other than becoming more like Jesus, they are much more apt to listen and see the sin in their lifestyles.
- Never water down sin but handle all sin the same. Each sin breaks the heart of God.

- I often say this when preaching, “I love you too much not to tell you the truth.”
- Consistency is a key also.
- Be careful of setting policies that do not allow a new Christian a chance to grow in his or her walk and understand progressive sanctification.
- Some people get saved and bring tons of baggage into this new relationship. Set them up to grow, win, and not to walk away from their new relationship with Jesus!

Knute Larson

- Well, often it does not. Back to one of our main challenges, which can be addressed by the example of the staff and leaders, and by true expository teaching about love for strangers and room for liberty.
- We must have the nerve and the love to be direct with some people. They may be leaders who speak out on issues or people who shun someone one-on-one because they do not look the way they would like or act the way they prefer. Many things do not get better on their own. Pastors were invented to deal with these issues!
- The mood of love and care as we speak is so significant. We can turn the whole church against a certain kind of people, and we can make the unbeliever look like the enemy instead of the object of our love and care. Our daughter once asked me, “Why is he so mad?” about a preacher on the television set.
- It may seem obvious, but simply teaching on how love is defined in the Bible is very important. This is not a feeling. It is “righteous action to meet the needs of another.” So many people in the church think that if they do not agree with someone or dislike being around them, they do not have to love them.
- Stand as a fellow struggler. Some of our temptations may be different, but we all are sinners and need God's daily grace. If we act like we are above all then the church may act like they are above the people around the church community. Care or disdain really show as we speak about our culture or people around the community. And many of the people model the mood they hear.

How do you help the staff, board, and other leaders stay balanced as you define it?

Jeff Bogue

- I talk them through whatever issues we’re dealing with, and try to involve them in the process of coming up with “our positions.”

- We often have policies in place (e.g., who we officiate weddings for, how we use our facility, etc.) that clearly state where we land on these issues and why.
- For the staff and leaders especially, sometimes the elders will draw the boundaries and that allows the staff to fall back on them. Sometimes this preserves relationship. The staff person can look at somebody they're trying to help and teach when saying, "Well, the elders of our church won't allow me to do that." This helps it not feel like a personal rejection.
- Relationally. As they work through and understand these things, lovingly and patiently walk them through the process.
- Finally, there are boundaries. We do look at our staff and say, "Here are some things you are not allowed to do... there are some things we do not want you commenting about on social media... as a representative of our church you should not be "Mr. Politics" or "Mr. Cynical" on social media..."

Jim Brown

- Keep them fully informed on the issues at hand and let them speak into the issue.
- Share openly and honestly the repercussions of each policy.
- Share your heart. I will often say, "Every decision we make will affect a real person and a relationship" we must keep that as a high priority.
- Be very clear about what is and is not acceptable and have them read it. We even have disclaimers for all social media platforms.

Knute Larson

- Stay ahead on issues. Read about them. Talk about them at staff meetings, board meetings, and with leader huddles. Do not wait until someone makes a joke about people who are different.
- Create policies before personalities are involved. People will always take it personally if you have to say, "I'll get back to you on that." How much better to say, "I have to obey our church policy on that issue," and try to add, "But I would still like to help this way..." Churches must have policies on marriage and remarriage, immorality, homosexuality, leadership and teaching positions, political emphases or teaching at the church, and more. These can be made by the board and kept as policy papers, not as part of the church constitution.
- Teach Romans 14 and liberty issues. Many older people were not brought up understanding these verses. We are clear where the Bible is clear, but we honor the room for differences of opinion on liberty issues of course.

- Teach and model that our mission as a church is not to convert culture, but individuals one by one.
- Emphasize the cross and the need for the redemptive and indwelling work of Christ and His Spirit. This must come before changes in attitudes and actions for all church people, including ones who are new and different. In the past some churches have turned people away by attitude or quick teaching about their practices before they even help them to understand the cross and new life in Christ.

Pastorpedia is a resource provided to you by CE National, a church effectiveness ministry. Please contact us at cenational@cenational.org or 574.267.6622 if we may be of any help to you or your ministry!

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