

## **“Roast Preacher for Lunch”**

A response to Bishop Janice Riggle Huie’s Episcopal Address to the 2002 sessions of the Little Rock and North Arkansas conferences.

In her 2002 Episcopal Address Bishop Huie said:

“However, there are some laity in our congregations who don't want the church to make any kind of change at all. Some simply don't like The United Methodist Church and what it stands for. Some are unhappy in their own personal lives. God alone knows everything that motivates fear and anxiety in people. Then some of these good folk have a tendency to take out their frustration and anger on the pastor. In his article published several years ago, Dr. G. Lloyd Rediger calls them “clergy killers.” Even in the most difficult congregation, there will only be a handful of these folks. Unfortunately, they can do a lot of damage.”

“And then, if some folk are having “roast preacher” for Sunday lunch as often they eat fried chicken or if other people are trying to hold the church hostage for money [Translation“The way to get the attention of those folks in Little Rock is just to keep our money at home.”] or if people are being disrespectful, or if your church has a revolving door of pastors, it is up to laity to hold laity accountable for their behavior.”

Let me underscore the fact that laity and churches can indeed, and do, become “clergy killers.” We have all seen their ugliness in action. It usually begins with one unhappy person and then it becomes common talk throughout the church. Folks then begin to add their own frustrations (usually having nothing to do with the pastoral leadership) to the mix. Some folks begin to talk to SPPR Committee members. Folks begin to indeed go home and “have roast preacher” for lunch. Friends if you have been a United Methodist for more than ten years, you probably have seen this in action.

During the past appointment year it was common knowledge that some churches had “run the preacher off.” Others tried every trick in the book and no change was made. Petitions and letters were circulated. Everyone was calling the DS and Bishop saying such things as “If you don’t move so and so then so and so is going to happen.”

The landscape was askew with the damaged lives of parsonage families. It is not just the preacher - - it is also spouses and children that also get roasted!

Having said all this let me turn the page over and look at the corollary of “Roast Preacher for Lunch.” From time to time the Bishop and Cabinet simply do not make a good match of pastor and congregation (for whatever reason).

Here is what Bishop Huie said about that in her Episcopal Address:

"Please know that this Bishop and our Cabinet are aware that sometimes we make mistakes in appointments. We make a bad “match.” By that I mean a good and capable pastor is appointed to a congregation that is simply not a good “fit” for pastor or congregation. Sometimes the Board of Ordained Ministry makes a mistake on who is admitted into conference membership. Sometimes a pastor who is effective in a smaller church doesn’t “grow into” a larger, more complex church. Pastors get sick and old and

“worn out”—as Asbury put it. Every pastor makes mistakes.”

As Bishop Huie said, sometimes a good appointment really goes bad. My philosophy for some time has been that in most cases that the congregation and pastor should prayerfully go for reconciliation and not divorce. When divorce happens and a move is made - - then the church will use that tactic every time there is a “fuss” in the family and you end up with a revolving door church.

But then how about those cases when the pastor has “stacked” the SPPR Committee (after all he/she chairs the Nominating Committee) and he/she and the committee are holding the congregation hostage. Usually the vote is 4 to 3 or something like that to stay, when the “real vote” of the congregation would be vastly different.

How about those cases when the pastor has no concept of partnering with their laity in the ministry of Jesus Christ? How about in those cases where the pastor makes all the decisions and does not consult anyone? How about in those cases where the pastor does not keep confidences? How about those cases when the pastor does all the hiring and firing of church staff without consulting anyone?

How about in those cases where family after family is leaving the church while others are withholding their money and others are simply staying away?

Yes, there have been cases where some or all of this has been going on and the SPPR still recommends that the pastor return.

What then?

Most families who still love and support their church are indeed having roast preacher and District Superintendent and Bishop for breakfast, lunch and dinner and dessert because going to church is just no fun anymore!

Then there is always that silent portion (sometimes a majority) in the church who are hurting deeply but who are not a part of the “power structure” and have no one to voice their hurt.

When all the fail-safe systems have failed what is a church to do?

Who gets “roasted” next?

Jim Lane  
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