



Ministering to *Difficult* People

Most everyone knows someone who only calls when they need something, and makes urgent demands on others to avert a crisis. In a parish community, such people may be considered “difficult”, and excluded from meaningful membership. Lora Carter Nafziger and Christine Guth, of the Anabaptist Disabilities Network, believe it is important for pastoral workers to accept responsibility for part of the difficulty. Feelings of resentment, anger and frustration should serve as signals urging us to respond with the love of Christ. The following are ways to minister to *difficult* people while preserving everyone’s dignity and self-respect.

- ***Cultivate compassionate respect***

People who ask for or demand help are dealing with multiple issues such as disability, relationship stress, financial problems, addiction, discrimination, trauma, and many other potential issues. Believe they are functioning the best they can with available resources. Consider manipulation or dishonesty as tactics they may have acquired in order to get their legitimate needs met. Show compassion by telling them how much you appreciate the way they are trying to cope with all their challenges.

- ***Set firm boundaries***

Healthy boundaries maintain relationships across time and allow more effective problem-solving. Be clear where your responsibilities end and others’ begin. Differentiate between requests that are appropriate and those that are not. Maintain a balance between your own needs, your self-respect and your relationship with the person making demands.

- ***Respond thoughtfully***

The tendency to respond quickly to those placing demands often grows out of feelings of anxiety. To reduce anxiety and to respond more effectively, ask for time to reply, take a moment to evaluate all the conditions of the request, stepping out of the room if needed to take a deep breath and center yourself in prayer. Then you will feel prepared to deliver a thoughtful response.

- ***Discover the amazing gifts hidden in marginalized people***

Hard work is rewarded. You will be enriched by serving the needs of others and graced with the discovery of the contribution even difficult people bring to Church.

Source: *Including “Difficult” People*, ADNotes, February 2011

<http://www.adnetonline.org/Resources/ADNotes>

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