

Roadmap to Creating Caring and Safe Churches

Adapted from "The Bully Project" for use in congregations

See www.thebullyproject.com for original

Through baptism and confirmation, the church agrees to “surround people with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be found faithful in their service to others.”¹

1. Find out how laity and staff feel about the church environment
 - a. In order for change to take root, an accurate picture of the church environment must be shown first
 - b. Here are some ways to go about assessing your church:
 - i. Conduct church-wide surveys in which people can name specific instances of bullying and/or times they felt unsafe at church or during a church event
 - ii. Make sure the surveys are completely anonymous and ask for how often, when, and where the instances of bullying took place and where and why a church event felt unsafe
 - iii. Make sure to pay close attention to those who may be more sensitive to bullying:
 1. The elderly
 2. LGBT individuals
 3. Those with mental or physical limitations
 4. Those seen as being at the “bottom” of society
 - iv. Designate a committee or task force that oversees these surveys and helps to implement strategies to make the church a safer place. This committee or task force should be made up of ministers, other staff, laity, youth, and older children to ensure that all voices are heard and to have people in different ministry areas to report back on the progress of these strategies
 - v. The results of the surveys and the strategies to be implemented should be made known to the congregation
 - c. Make sure to re-evaluate periodically (once a year, bi-annually, or quarterly) to make sure that the strategies are making a difference and creating a safer church
2. All individuals (ministers, staff, laity) should be a part of the solution
 - a. Ministers and staff should model anti-bullying behavior and empower the laity to follow
 - b. Use relationship maps to see if everyone has at least one person they trust within the church
 - i. Relationship maps are helpful for the entire congregation, but especially beneficial for special ministries like children, youth, young adults, etc.

¹ *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Baptismal Covenant I, 89.

- ii. Encourage staff to do relationship maps as well to critically analyze the relationships among the staff
 - c. Work with the task force mentioned above to enact consequences for bullying
- 3. Empower all laity to work together to make the church a safe place
 - a. Laity include children, youth, and young adults
 - b. They are the ones who experience bullying and know about what is going on within the church
 - c. Recruit laity to take leadership roles designed to create a more welcoming church
 - d. Make inclusion a priority
 - i. Make efforts to begin to eliminate opportunities for exclusion
 - 1. In children and youth groups-work to eliminate clique behavior
 - 2. Combine Sunday School classes or have a day where people go to a class they have never visited
 - 3. Find some people to critically analyze the church from the perspective of a visitor-specifically looking for places where there is exclusion. These can be members or people from outside of the community who are invited to come in and do this
 - 4. Have designated Sundays where congregants are encouraged to sit in a pew or chair they have not sat in before or sit by someone they would not normally sit by
 - e. Encourage staff and laity to talk about the efforts of inclusion on social media to let others know that this is a movement within the church
- 4. Institute church-wide rituals, special Sundays, traditions, and/or celebrations designed to celebrate diversity and reinforce a positive church community
 - a. Campaign to end hurtful language
 - i. The church should be a place where people are affirmed and feel safe
 - b. Have a special Sunday where the gifts of the entire congregation are shared, everyone from the youngest child to the oldest member can have a part in this service
 - c. Highlight the different gifts of the members on Sundays or other group meetings of the church
 - d. Allow the task force time to share its accomplishments and places for growth within the congregation
 - e. Create space and even traditions that are designed to allow members to express their individuality and have it celebrated in the wider church body