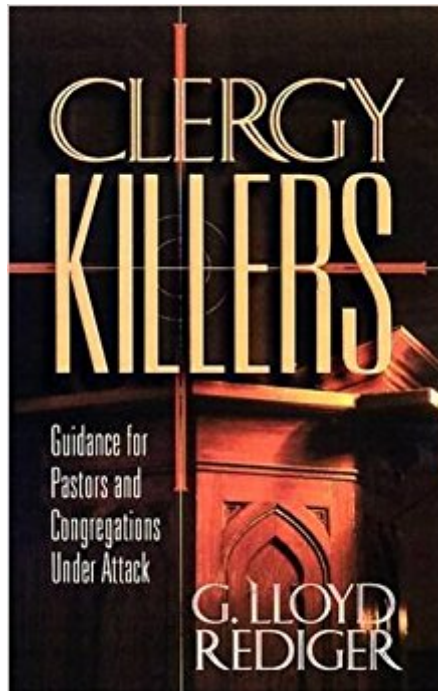




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Clergy Killers: Guidance For Pastors And Congregations Under Attack



Synopsis

Though some conflict in the church may be normal, there are some types of conflict which are abnormal and abusive. Within some congregations there are personalities who seek to unsettle the relationship between minister and congregation. In this engaging and useful book, G. Lloyd Rediger offers strategies to prevent abuse, support clergy, and to build healthier congregations.

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Customer Reviews

G. Lloyd Rediger is a pastor, pastoral counselor, and consultant on spiritual leadership. He has written for several national religious publications and is the author of a number of books, including the best-selling *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations under Attack*.

How sad that I didn't read *Clergy Killers* earlier. This book could save me lots of blood. The way the book is written, tells me that the secret of its author's deep insight is in his personal experience with the subject. Rediger's research is a prophetic warning against killing the prophets. The author is concerned that the "tribe" that kills its shaman loses its soul. The book asks a question of why people act like they do and explains the difference between a common conflict and the abuse. Such incivility, according to Rediger, reflects the mood of our society. The church needs the wakeup call. In response to aggression, pastors become dysfunctional, asocial, experiencing personality disorders that lead to further alienation. Suicide, according to Rediger, is a

possibility. Clergy's identity confusion contributes to the problem. Pastors do what they are trained to do just to find themselves "unsupported by denominational offices." Pastors' success is measured by megachurch standards and if they do not meet the expectation of their congregations to become "mega clergy," they are punished. Denominational officials make "little effort to correct the basic issues." Rediger believes that change is important, but when the church loses its tradition it leaves people angry and cynical with little respect for pastors. Seems like training of laity and of clergy can be a big factor in avoiding conflicts, but, unfortunately, training materials "do not incorporate insights from psychological disciplines about such issues as denial, projection, defensiveness, ego struggle, and competition." Here was my "Aha!" moment. I was always wondering why those very leaders I empowered were giving me problems. I treated them as equals, believing that we are all equally called to ministry. Rediger explains, "When power is equal but training and perception are not, conflict is inevitable." Rediger's insight on people's agendas and motivations was of a very special interest to me. We pastors, are not trained enough to analyze why people act the way they do. My conclusion? Courageous position, unusual approach, and simply great writing!

There are certainly some gems in this book and helpful ways of re-framing particular moments of conflict. It is also helpful when asking the question of "Is this normal?" when thinking of specific types of conflict in the church. The case studies are also an excellent tool for examining with a church leadership team. These strengths are why I did not give one star. However, in the last two decades since this was written we've learned a lot more about mental illness and personality disorders that has put portions of this book woefully out of date (it was probably out of date within four or five years of its publishing). The author's view of borderline personality disorder is particularly anachronistic. The author seems to try to take care to avoid contributing to stigmas towards mental illness through various disclaimers, which may have been on target twenty years ago, but would certainly be within the "stigma" range by our current standards (in relationship to what folks with a mental illness can be trusted with/are capable of). The author's ideas about evil and how they connect it to conflict/personality disorders are a bit troubling in how they may be applied as ways of justifying extreme responses. This is a problem with the whole book however as just the idea of the label "clergy killer" can be used to cover a lot of wrongs (despite the person bearing the label still needing

to be treated as seriously and carefully as the book suggests). I was on-board for sifting through the aged and troubling pieces for the gems inside until I reached the case study where the author suggests being overweight is somehow a red flag about someone's mental health or capability as a pastor. While not out and out fat shaming, it certainly showed a bias against overweight folks to suggest it was somehow evidence of a negative coping mechanism or unfitness for leadership. The author also doesn't seem to understand how someone who is overweight has difficulty finding clothing that fits their unique frame, and as such they are often branded as "slovenly dressed" (l. 1455) as the author does in the book, which the author then proceeds to brand as an additional red flag. After clarifying they never treated this individual so they can't make a diagnosis, the author proceeds to label them with pretty much everything in the DSM (l. 1478). I've observed this same bias in the training/ordination process of my own tradition and was surprised by such an archaic and flat out wrong concept still kicking around. This book obviously is informed by some of those same streams, or may be the means of perpetuating this idea as this book was popular among a generational group that was significantly represented in the leadership of these trainings/evaluations. We support overweight pastors, as this idea beyond the normal cultural bias alone, also stems from them being treated as a sort of "local celebrity" because of their position up front and on stage and the idealized body types that come along with this. The more we learn about the importance of being "healthy at any size" rather than a single idealized shape, the more important this becomes and the less we can hide behind a facade of just being concerned about someone's health when critiquing their size (big or small). The author also suggests in this same "Killer Clergy" section that roughly 2-4% of clergy suffer from a mental illness, a rate lower than the general population (l. 1502). Now, the author does refer to this as a "mental disorder" so if I'm missing a distinction between disorder and illness that the author intended, please disregard this. But if it is being used as a synonym for mental illness This doesn't line up with current research or understanding of how clergy suffer from mental illness which range from equal to or exceeding the general population. Current research suggests as many as 1 in 4 Clergy suffer from a mental illness, with clergy suffering from clinical depression and generalized anxiety disorders at a HIGHER rate than the general population. Reading this "Killer Clergy" section just made me think about how pastors with mental illness feel enough shame and stigma as it is. Clergy still feel afraid of losing their jobs over disclosing a mental illness diagnosis not only because of the general job security stigma against those who suffer from mental illness, but the particular stereotype of expecting pastors to be free of mental illnesses and other general human nuances. The author pushes back against this perfectionism but then also seems to support it in this resistance to the idea of pastors

with mental illness. This "Killer Clergy" section manages to go back and forth from the helpful ideas of supporting a pastor with mental illness in their treatment and self-care and suggesting that this creates an unfitness of incompetence in a pastor. Basically, you could proof-text it to support whichever side you want. So while I believe (and hope) that as a professional in mental health, the author certainly means to advocate supporting clergy in their mental health care, they were certainly not careful enough to not give ammunition to the stigma side. Some of the best spiritual leaders in history suffered from one form of mental illness or another and the unique stresses of the profession also may cause presentations and symptoms a simpler career wouldn't. We must support our mentally ill clergy, not shame them. I realized I only noticed just how stigma-related the authors' conclusions were once they were applied to clergy, as this is who I work with. But reading back the same archaic ideas and biases also exist in the previous chapters, but applied to the more general population of a congregation. While the prescriptions remain the same: help the congregant in their mental health journey and develop good boundaries in a church and take advantage of the denominational structures already in place, the picture it paints of people with mental illness, trauma histories and other atypical neurologies needs an overhaul to still be useful with everything we understand today. The book is a product of its time, and I believe in the book's current state would misrepresent what the author would say today if they have kept up with mental health research and our understanding of the damaging effects of mental health stigma. However, many of the authors' strategies and suggestions are still worthwhile for pastors, elders, deacons, trustees and denominational leaders. So while I would certainly share these rare quotes from this book still in my work, I would never, ever hand this book over to anyone in church leadership as a whole package. My hope is that an update, revised and expanded version of this book will one day exist. Since the author is now in their 80's, it may not be done by them. However, I would still hope to see an excellent work based on the strong parts of this book someday as the dangers it outlines and many of the overlooked strategies it recommends are still useful.

As a retired United Methodist pastor I can put a face to every character in the book. I am now Catholic and my Priest asked for a copy. God bless all the UM pastors and their pulpits. Pray for them all, and all denomination pastors of this meanness.

It was an okay read, but really, common sense, once again, is most helpful. There were a few insightful passages, and if you are dealing with an antagonistic person(s) in your congregation, this might be a good book for you to read. I work with churches in trouble, so I run into these kinds of

things all the time, so maybe I'm just more in tune with the kinds of things that "breed" Clergy Killers.

Sooner or later, a problem in many congregational settings. A good guide for what both clergy and lay people are up against when they encounter a person or group who wants to attack the pastor and or the congregation which they serve.

Clergy abuse is prevalent, yet most people have never heard the term. When asked by a PNC what gifts I bring to the church, I replied, "I take care of the pastor.". (Crickets chirp). I expounded with: " I make sure he takes his days off, vacation, study leave, a warm meal once a day, a loving heart, a listening ear, & a soft spot to land. Beyond that, I expect to be treated like any other church member."

This is a negative and depressing book. It is not too helpful when a pastor needs affirmation and constructive suggestions. A better book, now out of print, is Antagonists in the Church by Kenneth Haugk.

Highly recommended. This book should be read by church leadership BEFORE these types of problems emerge or get out of hand. Insightful author, well written and easy to understand.

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