

DEALING WITH RESISTANCE

*Ten Common Reasons for Resistance to Change
..AndHow to Deal With It*

1. Loss of Control Most pastoral leaders and parishioners want and need to feel in control of the events around them.

What to Do: The more choices we give people, the better they will feel about change. More involvement can help people feel more committed to the change. If done well, it helps build a sense of community. If people feel out of control and powerless, they are likely not only to feel stressed but to react in defensive and territorial ways. It is what lies behind many people leaving the parish.

2. Excessive Uncertainty Not knowing enough about what the next step is makes feeling comfortable or positive about it impossible.

What to Do: Pastoral leaders need to be convinced themselves that this is the right thing to do and then share information with parishioners to let them know what is happening, what will happen, and when more information will be available.

3. Surprise The first response to something totally new or unexpected is resistance. Decisions for change can be such a shock that there is no time to assimilate them. It leads people to feeling threatened and to resist.

What to Do: Providing as much information as possible to build a commitment to change helps. Giving people enough time beforehand allows them to get ready.

4. Difference Effect Change requires that people become conscious of and question familiar routines and habits.

What to Do: Much of parish life is habitual. Pastoral leaders need to minimize or reduce the number of differences introduced in a change. If you can't worship in the same place, at least worship at the same time, with the same kind of liturgy, and sit in the same part of the church.

5. Loss of Face Sometimes making a commitment to something new implies that there must have been something wrong with the old or that those trying to keep the old parish or school going have failed.

What to Do: People need to be reminded that their work mattered and was a critical part not only of the past but of the foundation for the future.

6. Concern about Future Competence People may feel threatened that they will not be competent or their skills welcomed in a new environment. They may wonder if their group or function will continue, whether they will be replaced, and what may be expected of them.

What to Do: It is important to help people feel competent and appreciated by getting them information and training so they can understand what is happening and master new approaches and new skills.

7. Ripple Effects Change disrupts personal plans and family activities. It changes relationships and routines.

What to Do: Changes need to be introduced as flexibly as possible, through careful timing of when a change should begin and clear communication about what to expect and when.

8. More Work Change requires more energy, more time and greater mental preoccupation.

What to Do: Leaders need to acknowledge that change is often a lot harder than not changing but that it is for the better. They need to provide opportunities to celebrate the efforts of parish staff, parishioners, and each of the steps taken to make the change.

9. Past Resentments Anyone who has ever had a gripe against a parish, diocese or any bureaucracy is more likely to resist a pastoral change.

What to Do: Unresolved grievances need to be named and addressed whenever possible. Parishioners who never felt welcomed in the parish next door are not going to suddenly feel at home because of a restructuring plan. Going forward may mean going back, listening to past resentments and addressing them.

10. A Real Threat Sometimes change creates real winners and losers. People lose their influence, their convenience, their comfort and sometimes their jobs.

What to Do: If employees are going to be changed or other hard decisions need to be made, parish leaders should not drag this out. As soon as it is known, the people involved should be informed. Knowing that the thing you fear is true can actually provide a sense of relief. People can then begin to make plans and necessary adjustments to their lives.