

Case Study ~ St. Luke's Church

St. Luke's Church is a small Lutheran church in a medium sized town in California. Like many Lutheran churches, it finds itself aging and wants to reach out to the few young adults who attend the church and expand their ministry. Recently, a new young pastor has come to lead the church and has new ideas for attracting young adults and their children.

Jessica is the leader of the young adults. She is a single mother, and she and her partner Danny have an "on again off again" relationship. Danny and Jessica are the parents of Zoe and Jack, ages 3 and 6 months. Danny is not as interested in church, but comes about half the time. Jessica was raised in the church and was confirmed. She is the volunteer coordinator of the Christian Education ministry. She is not sure, but she suspects that her daughter Zoe might have some learning disabilities or cognitive disorder. She has been reading a lot of material on the issue and despite having basic medical insurance, has been trying to get doctors to diagnose Zoe.

Martha is the leader of the seniors. Her husband recently died after a long illness with cancer. She is a retired school librarian and serves on the Church Council as the Secretary. She is the mother of three adult children, including Sarah, who is five years older than Jessica and one of Jessica's close friends. All except one of Martha's grandchildren live two hours away, and the one grandson, Noah, does not attend church. Martha's daughter Sarah is a closeted lesbian, and Jessica has been encouraging her to try and come out to her mother. Martha is always trying to get young men to ask Sarah out and cannot understand why Sarah does not pursue marriage with a man. Sarah is also in the midst of completing a law degree and preparing to sit for the bar exam. She is very stressed out, hard working, and a faithful member of the church. She often helps Jessica with children's ministry at the church.

When Pastor Diana came, she met with Jessica and Sarah and talked about what they could do to encourage more participation with young adults. The three women came up with an idea called "Fun Fridays," once a month. The church would sponsor a meal for the young adults in the parish hall and the children would be babysat in the basement. They would hire a sitter to work with the children, and hoped that the child care would eventually turn into an education program. It is to be noted that Diana does not know that Sarah is closeted and only Jessica and Danny know Sarah's secret.

The young adults would be led in a discussion by Pastor Diana. In order to make the parish hall more inviting for the young adults, the women decide to ask the congregation for money to purchase two Ikea couches for the young adult program and a series of videos that Pastor Diana would use with the group. They will also ask the congregation to provide the meals with homemade lasagna, meatloaf and/or pork roast each session. The women are thrilled and excited about the new venture and announce it the next Sunday in church. They create a sign-up for meals, seek a babysitter, and request money from the Church Council for the couches.

After the church service, Martha confronts Pastor Diana and Jessica with fierce anger. She is upset that the Church Council was never consulted about the new ministry and that the funds had not been approved. Martha says, "It was a total mistake calling Pastor Diana if this is how things are going to go." Martha demands that no event should be put on the calendar until after the next Council Meeting that they cease immediately attempting to gather support for the ministry.

Jessica is both crushed and intimidated by Martha and leaves in tears. Martha says she is just doing what is right. Diana had no idea that the church would be resistant, as developing a ministry with young adults was one of their stated priorities. She tries to reason with Martha, but is cut off.

Over the next weeks, the situation turns into an all out battle between the young adults and the traditional seniors at the church. Pastor Diana decides to hold a special meeting in which the two groups work on a Polarity Map together and try to come to an agreement.

Roles~

Pastor Diana

Jessica

Sarah

Hazel (Church Council President,
wants a Young Adult ministry)

Danny

Dave (another Young Adult)

Mel (another senior)

Martha