

## **FREQUENCY OF NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER IN PASTORS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY**

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### **Introduction**

Modern church conflicts are usually framed around the issues being fought over (Brubaker 2010, Sande 2004). In our experience, the issues may be important, but deeper approaches that identify the competing and unmet needs of the people at the center of a conflict generally offer greater opportunities for meaningful dialogue, lasting settlements, and forgiveness and reconciliation than do those methodologies that focus only on the identified issues (Bush and Folger 2005, Puls 2013).

Popular thinking has the pastor in church conflict as a target and victim of forces he or she cannot control. Over the course of time, we independently noted a large percentage of church conflicts where the pastor was the instigator and the issues centered on the pastor and his or her behaviors that included grandiosity, paranoia, rage, arrogance, lack of empathy, the inability to forgive, and his or her demands for appreciation, adulation, and compensation. The behaviors were self-destructive and nonsensical. In these cases, the pastor was indeed his own worst enemy. Not trained in abnormal psychology, we sought the assistance of Christian therapists and a Christian Psychiatrist. Each of them labeled the core of these unresolvable conflicts as Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). Capps concludes that, while theologians denounce narcissistic behaviors in the pulpit and congregation, churches do not understand or recognize it (Capps 1993, 4). We agree. Once we knew what we were dealing with, and after appropriate research to gain a deeper understanding of NPD, its formation, symptoms, and outcomes, we concluded that churches are largely unaware of the symptoms of NPD and the deleterious effects of a pastor with NPD on the congregation.

NPD in the clergy has barely been studied. The church conflict management literature rarely mentions any form of mental illness in the clergy beyond depression and burnout. We found no mention of clergy with NPD as a cause or even a contributing factor for conflict in congregations except in a few informal online postings.

Haugk comes closest in his identification of five major personality characteristics that cause congregational conflict: negative self-concept, aggression, rigidity, authoritarianism, and narcissism (Haugk 1988, 60). The few studies we found present a disturbing picture. Zondag concluded that 90% of Dutch pastors ranked high in narcissistic characteristics as follows: undisguised (69%), masking (18%), balanced (9%), and vulnerable (3%) (Zondag 2004a, 432-33; see also Zondag, Van Halen & Wojtkowiac 2009). According to Zondag, undisguised narcissistic pastors are largely able to function in reasonably healthy ways by focusing their narcissism into positive outlets. It is the 18% whom Zondag categorizes as masking and the 3% he calls vulnerable who are attempting to hide their dangerous levels of narcissism from themselves and everyone else (Zondag 2004a, 432).

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Based on our experience and the lack of useful data, a study of NPD in the clergy seemed warranted.

### Defining NPD

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (American Psychiatric Association 2012) defines Narcissistic Personality Disorder as follows:

- A. Significant impairments in personality functioning manifested by:
    - 1. Impairments in self functioning (a or b):
      - a. Identity: Excessive reference to others for self-definition and self-esteem regulation; exaggerated self-appraisal may be inflated or deflated, or vacillate between extremes; emotional regulation mirrors fluctuations in self-esteem.
      - b. Self-direction: Goal-setting is based on gaining approval from others; personal standards are unreasonably high in order to see oneself as exceptional, or too low based on a sense of entitlement; often unaware of own motivations.
- AND
- 2. Impairments in interpersonal functioning (a or b):
    - a. Empathy: Impaired ability to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others; excessively attuned to reactions of others, but only if perceived as relevant to self; over- or underestimate of own effect on others.
    - b. Intimacy: Relationships largely superficial and exist to serve self-esteem regulation; mutuality constrained by little genuine interest in others' experiences and predominance of a need for personal gain
- B. Pathological personality traits in the following domain:
    - 1. Antagonism, characterized by: grandiosity: Feelings of entitlement, either balanced or covert; self-centeredness; firmly holding to the belief that one is better than others; condescending toward others.
    - 2. Attention seeking: Excessive attempts to attract and be the focus of the attention of others; admiration seeking.
  - C. The impairments in personality functioning and the individual's personality trait expression are relatively stable across time and consistent across situations.
  - D. The impairments in personality functioning and the individual's personality trait expression are not better understood as normative for the individual's developmental stage or socio-cultural environment.
  - E. The impairments in personality functioning and the individual's personality trait expression are not solely due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, medication) or a general medical condition (e.g., severe head trauma).

### The Scope of the Problem

Every person has narcissistic tendencies but the literature on NPD provided some alarming findings when applied to pastors. Sandage and Moe note that religion and "an intense commitment to the sacred seems to fuel narcissism" (Sandage & Moe, 2011, 410). Narcissism demands an image of perfection and pride, which are summarily rejected by Christian belief in favor of brokenness and humility. Hotchkiss states that narcissistic envy apprehends God as a rival to be diminished (Hotchkiss 2003, 18). This presents a natural tension for the narcissist pastor in that his or her drive for power and adulation runs counter to Christian spirituality. How they might deal with this

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tension is nuanced (Ghorbani, Watson, et al. 2004, Wink & Dillon 2008, Wink, Dillon, & Fay 2005, Hall & Edwards 2002), but an ongoing tension nevertheless.

The problem is insidious. Pastors are trusted with our most intimate life details, are invited into our most difficult times, and are seen as trusted spiritual and relational advisors (Shupe 2008). How, then, can a pastor who requires praise and adulation, who feels no empathy for the people who support him, and who manipulates others for the sole purpose of meeting his own voracious needs be that person? Christ's example of "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22:39) would be comprehensible only at a dim intellectual level.

### Narcissistic Personality Disorder in the general population.

Ronningstam (2008, 112) summarized the incidence of NPD in various settings: general population 0%–5.3%; Wave 2, NESRAC lifetime prevalence 4.8%–7.7%; clinical population 1.3%–17%; forensic population 6%; outpatient private practice 8.5%–20%; military 20%; and first year medical students 17%. The *DSM-5* considers NPD to range between 0 percent and 6.2 percent in the general population (*DSM-5*. 2013, 671).

It is logical that the military and medicine would attract narcissists as both deal with holding, and sometimes exercising, the power of life and death. Both professions are power-centric and would appeal to deep ego needs for control, power, and recognition. Ministry is similar. It has the power of the pulpit, the imprimatur of holy writ, and the aura of the supernatural. Ministers are automatically placed in a category of their own as being above other people in that they are holy and ordained, called specifically by God and operating on His behalf (Shupe 2008).

Williford and Williford list six signs of narcissism in clergy: 1) all decision making centers on them; 2) impatience or a lack of ability to listen to others; 3) delegating without giving proper authority or with too many limits; 4) feelings of entitlement; 5) feeling threatened or intimidated by other talented staff; and 6) needing to be the best and brightest in the room (Williford & Williford 2006, 104–110). Kohut includes sexual perversion fantasies or lack of interest in sex, an inability to form and maintain significant relationships, a lack of humor, empathy, or sense of proportion, unaccountable rage and pathological lying. Narcissistic vulnerability leads to defensiveness in the form of belittling others and self-belittling jokes; the narcissist uses sarcasm in place of healthy humor (Kohut 1976, 23, 263).

### Spirituality and narcissism

If NPD in the clergy is the antithesis of Christ as the Good Shepherd, we wondered if there were differences between the non-NPD and NPD populations in terms of spiritual discipline and practice. The rage and need for ego supply in NPD are contrasted with expectations of peaceful humility in spiritual and religious settings. "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 19:19) and "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31) would seem foreign and even incomprehensible to the person with NPD. Though often placed in a framework of self-love, narcissism is more about shame and self-hatred. Shame can be described as seeing oneself not as guilty of something separate from oneself, but as describing who one actually is: broken, ugly, and beyond repair. This shame is unbearable and must be defeated. Martens writes, "Shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It is the most poignant experience of the self by the self, a wound felt from the inside, dividing individuals from both themselves and each other" (Martens 2005, 11). Shame is so intolerable to the narcissist that he develops various means to block it entirely from his experience. Instead, the shame is directed outward towards others—it can never be his or her fault (Hotchkiss 2003, 6). Thus the narcissist, who cannot be wrong, is vaulted into the role of victim when something goes wrong, which in itself is a powerful role (Lerner 2009, 181).

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The narcissist can often be drawn into the practice of seeking “spiritual perfectionism and validating shame-based scrupulosity and self-punishment” (Campbell & Miller 2011, 414). This is a self-defeating Möbius cycle having only one side and one boundary that never ends, for its goals are impossible to reach and the means are self-defeating.

Dutch researcher Hessel Zondag placed pastors into four groups: 1) those who have a natural orientation which causes them to see religion as a way of life where they may live out their piety and convictions; 2) those who seek to maintain a balance between faith and doubts even though they may not be totally convinced and often accept tentative answers to major theological problems; 3) those who need others to help them shape and understand their faith; and 4) narcissist pastors who “turn to religion for support, safety and social security” (Zondag 2001, 314–15).

The narcissist pastor, being self-preoccupied, assumes that God must also be self-preoccupied. Preoccupation with the self results in predatory rivalry. Therefore, if everyone is a rival, then God must be the supreme rival (McWilliams 1992, 124). The result is that the object of that envy, the rival, must be destroyed (Schwartz-Salant 1982, 41) or at least neutralized. Such overt hostility is not tolerable in a pastor, of course, leaving him or her to more subtle devices to attain ascendancy and eventual supremacy. This presents an unrelenting paradoxical tension for the narcissist who apprehends God as a rival to be vanquished rather than an overpowering love to be served. Thus, the NPD pastor equates his sermon to a performance where God is the titular object but he or she, the pastor, is the true object of affection. This creates a pseudo-intimacy between pastor and congregation and the belief in the narcissist that he or she is relating to others (Pinsky 2009, 105). Seeing these unresolvable tensions, and having access to an excellent study population, we decided to test the following hypothesis: Narcissistic Personality Disorder exists among the clergy of the Presbyterian Church in Canada at a higher rate than in the general population. A secondary hypothesis was that pastors with NPD would have a shallower spiritual life and experience than their more balanced peers.

### The Study

This study examined the levels of Narcissistic Personality Disorder within the ordained clergy of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC). It was a quantitative study giving a statistical summary of the results and trends regarding diagnosable overt and covert NPD observed within the test group. We sought a broad sampling of ages, ethnicities, tenure, and experiences within the ordained clergy of the PCC. However, those who chose to complete the study were self-selected.

The survey was offered to 1385 ordained clergy of active, inactive/retired categories. The active group (N=643) consisted of 495 males and 148 females while the inactive or retired group (N=742) consisted of 571 males and 171 females.

### Instrumentation

The Netherlands Narcissism Scale (NNS) was selected for this process. The NNS measures both overt and covert types of NPD, isolation, and sense of self-sufficiency (Zondag, Van Halen & Wojtowiak 2009). It uses a seven point Likert-type response scale for each question for nuanced responses and has been utilized with clergy in the Netherlands and Poland providing comparable results. The NNS measures the levels of balanced narcissism, as well as overt and covert NPD. Isolation measures the degree to which the person feels separated from other people and unable to be understood by them and is associated with covert narcissism. Self-satisfaction indicates the level to which the individual feels superior to others, and this is usually found to be associated with overt narcissism often shown in the desire to dominate others (Zondag 2006, 230–31).

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The indicators of overt narcissism are drawn from Narcissistic Personality Inventory as developed by Raskin and Hall in 1979 and 1981, and refined by Raskin and Terry in 1988. The measures for covert narcissism are drawn from Henden and Cheek's Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (Henden & Cheek 1997) and was based on Murray's work from 1938. Brouwer and Debats found satisfactory reliability in both overt and covert findings while also noting that the reliability of the isolation measurement would need to be improved in subsequent editions of the scale (Brouwer & Debats 1998).

The NNS has been used with reliable results by Ettema and Zondag (2002), Zondag (2005, 2007), Nauta and Derckx (2007), and Zondag, van Halen and Wojtokwiak (2009). Overt and covert reliabilities were observed as .71 and .81 and .74 and .82 respectively. Links were discovered between "self-esteem, empathy, meaning of life and burnout," with Alpha reliabilities of 0.73 for overt narcissism, 0.77 for covert narcissism, 0.72 for isolation, and 0.60 for self-satisfaction.

### **Procedures**

The NNS was administered embedded in a survey of ministerial leadership qualities, since narcissists consider themselves to have leadership ability (Lee & Ashton 2012, 46). Piety questions related to Bible study, prayer, sermon preparation, pastoral visitation, and spiritual development were added to test the differences, if any, between NPD pastors and their non-NPD peers. Demographic questions were added to more clearly delineate correlations between narcissism and age groups, gender, and education.

### **Demographic Data**

There were 420 respondents for an overall response rate of 30%. Of these, 210 (32.7%) in the active group responded and 153 (20.3%) of the retired clergy responded. The median age was 59.8 years and the median time since ordination was 34.8 years. The median time for active clergy in ordained ministry was 25.83 years with a range from less than one year to 70 years. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 96 years. Responses were received from clergy serving in 44 of the 46 presbyteries representing all eight synods. This represents an overall response rate of 28 percent, representing 32.7 percent of the active clergy and 24 percent of those on the appendix to the rolls (retired) and 22 clergy not on active service but not retired. There were 28 incomplete questionnaires that were not included in the tabulations, leaving a survey base of 392.

### **Results**

Narcissistic Personality Disorder has found its way into the institutional church. The actual levels and places where it manifests itself have been surprising. Within the clergy of the PCC, there appears to be much higher levels of the most destructive expressions of narcissism than in the general population; while this was anticipated, the actual levels were greater than expected. In its covert form narcissism appears to arrive later in the practice of ministry, which was not anticipated. NPD appears to decline steadily through time in ministry; however, its continued presence is noted in some individuals well into retirement. Pastors with Narcissistic Personality Disorder are to be found in all areas of the country at rates 400%-500% higher than are found in the general population (1%-6%). Narcissists can be found in every age and experience range, and in both sexes.

#### **Overt (Balanced) Narcissism**

There were 317 individuals with high levels of overt narcissism, 220 (57 percent of the total) of which were scored as meeting Zondag's description of balanced narcissist. These individuals appear to have the self-confidence to be leaders, but are not so intent upon gaining power or

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personal acknowledgement that it would sabotage their ministries. Those with these markers tend to be younger clergy, which was anticipated, and those serving the largest sized congregations.

### Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)

Ninety-seven individuals had diagnosable levels of overt NPD, scoring at least 5 of the 9 markers for NPD in the DSM-5. All nine markers were noted in one individual who scored a five or higher on the 7 point Likert scale in 24 out of 28 questions. Individuals who had 5 or more markers in 10 or more of the 28 questions were placed in this category. The average had 7.9 markers spread over 14.1 questions. Twenty-six scored at least once in all markers, which means that, according to Capps, they think are God (Capps 2008), rather than the servants of God.

### Covert NPD

Twenty pastors scored high levels of covert narcissism, as determined by high scores being observed in at least 5 of the 9 markers through questions 1 to 11 on the NNS. The set of covert narcissists averaged 5.8 markers in 7.4 questions with only one showing all nine in 11 questions. These individuals showed among the highest scores in all levels of narcissism averaging 123.9 out of a possible 196 ranging from 97 to 171.

### Overall Results

Percentages of overt and covert NPD:

PCC as a whole:	25% and 4.6% = 29.6% total
Active ministers:	26% and 5.2% = 31.2% total
Retired clergy:	15.4% and 5.4% = 20.8% total

Those who are ordained, have left active ministry but are not retired had a combined overt and covert NPD rate of 57%. Whether or not they left ministry involuntarily or found that active ministry did not offer enough narcissistic supply is not known. Lay and diaconal ministers scored 14% each in NPD but zero in covert narcissism.

### Narcissism by regions

NPD in overt and covert forms was found in all regions, synods, age groups, and in both sexes. Due to the small numerical size of the synods of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario with 42 clergy (MBNWO), Saskatchewan with 21 clergy (SK), and Alberta and the Northwest with 81 (ABNW), these three synods were grouped together for comparison purposes (Prairie) with 144 clergy. This takes the prairie region from reporting as the three smallest synods by study population to being the second smallest.

**Table 1. Demographics and NPD by Regions**

<i>Region:</i>	<b>Atlantic</b>	<b>QEO</b>	<b>CNOB</b>	<b>SWO</b>	<b>Prairies</b>	<b>BC</b>
Age	59	59.03	60.4	59.95	57.25	64.74
Degrees	2.63	2.32	2.38	2.35	2.07	2.17
Ordination	21.9	26.97	27.34	24.87	22.94	29.89
Time PCC	33.8	36.78	34.13	35.53	33.48	36.13
%Covert	5 %	8%	5.8%	2.4%	3%	4.4%
% Overt	18%	38%	24%	24%	16.6%	22%
<b>% Total</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>29.8%</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>19.6%</b>	<b>26.4%</b>

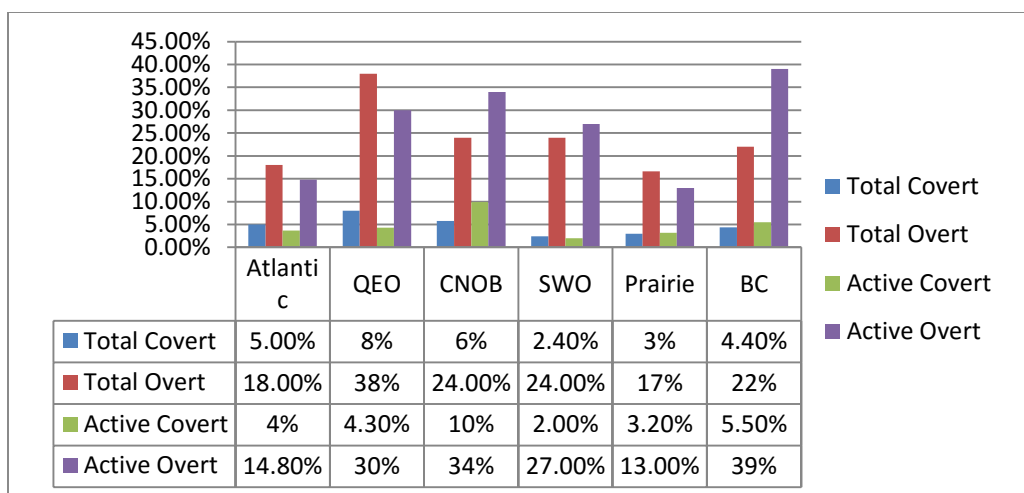
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The BC figure is somewhat skewed in that 72 percent of the responses for the synod were from retired clergy. When the retired and “other” categories are removed from the demographic data, British Columbia goes from having the most experienced clergy to having the group with the least time in the denomination, the youngest active clergy, and the highest rate of combined NPD at 39%. The prairie region has the lowest level of NPD at 16.6%, while the Synod of Southwestern Ontario shows the lowest percentage of covert narcissism at 2.4%.

The Synod of Quebec and Eastern Ontario has the highest rates of NPD at 38%, or 1.5 times the national peer rate of 25% and shows a rate of 8% for covert NPD (total = 48%) compared with the national rate of 4.6%.

There are both positive and negative correlations between NPD and active or retired clergy in some regions of the country. While there is virtually no difference in the Prairie Region and only a minimal difference in the levels of NPD in Southwestern Ontario, and even a slight decline in the Atlantic region, there is a significant increase in the Central Ontario Synod and a major increase in British Columbia. Quebec and Eastern Ontario show an increase in percentages of covert narcissism and a decrease in overt NPD.

**Table 2. Comparison of Narcissistic Responses as Percentage of Active Clergy by Region**



The data revealed an interesting anomaly. NPD was higher than average in the nation’s largest cities of Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and the federal capital of Ottawa, but lower in only slightly smaller centers such as Hamilton, London, Winnipeg, Calgary and Edmonton. The reason is unknown.

### NPD and congregation size

There were variations in levels of NPD by the size of congregation.

**Table 3: NPD and Size of Congregation Served**

Congregation Size	Covert %	Overt %	Total %
Under 35	4.5	23	<b>27.5</b>
35-60	3.1	25	<b>28.1</b>
60-100	4	22.5	<b>26.5</b>
100-150	5.7	24.5	<b>30.2</b>
150-200	6.25	25	<b>31.25</b>

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Over 200	0	28	<b>28</b>
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The larger the congregation the greater the likelihood is that the pastor will have overt NPD. The levels of overt NPD are highest in congregations with over 200 people while covert narcissism peaks in those with under 200 and disappeared in those with over 200 in worship. We do not know if this disappearance is an anomaly, though we suspect that it is. However, this also suggests that covert narcissism may be a limiting factor in the growth and health of a congregation, or that the coverts avoid the largest congregations. Conversely, it may be that the covert narcissist pastor finds it increasingly difficult to manage his/her various supply needs and destructive behaviors within larger congregations.

**Table 4: NPD and Piety**

<b>Piety Practice (“Yes” answers)</b>	<b>Non-NPD %</b>	<b>Composite %</b>	<b>Covert %</b>	<b>Overt %</b>
Have a daily prayer routine	56	53.5	35	48
Have daily scripture reading	51	46.5	35	40
Bible reading is hit or miss	47	49.5	60	56.7
Has an organized routine of pastor visitation	34	31.5	15	24
Prefers “As needed” pastor visitation	40	44	55	56
Enjoys working with all ages	87	84	75	86.6
Enjoys working with specific age groups	5	8	20	9.3
Prefers working with volunteers over paid staff	67	69	60	59
Spends time alone in sermon preparation	68	63	55	69
Can pray anywhere	90	87.6	100	88.6

As expected, there were differences in piety between the balanced clergy and those who scored high on NPD. There were also differences between the covert and overt forms. As expected, the covert NPD’s engaged in the fewest piety practices, followed closely by their overt NPD peers. Likewise, the coverts did as few visitations as possible and can accurately be described as doing visitation only when it is absolutely necessary or the person being visited is an authority/power figure to the pastor. Whether this is a function of their NPD or simply because they are shy is not known. One of the hallmarks of NPD is overarching self-confidence, which would account for the coverts lack of time in sermon preparation—they believe that they can wing it due to their view of their intellectual properties as being superior. A surprising finding was their self-reported ability to pray anywhere, while the balanced and overts were almost identical. Given their covert NPD and introverted personalities, we expected the opposite.

Conversely, that the overts spent the most time in sermon preparation is at first surprising, as they are so self-confident. However, since they apprehend God as a rival, we suspect that they see their sermons as performance art and performing well takes preparation and practice. We also expected a higher rate of preference for working with volunteers as other paid staff are often seen as threats to the NPD pastor, but this was not the case.



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### Discussion

The hypothesis that the ministerial profession attracts individuals with Narcissistic Personality Disorder as a means of supply for their psychological needs is supported. NPD in active clergy in the PCC is between 500% to 3000% higher than is found in the general population. The problem is real, and it seems that ministry attracts narcissists for the same reasons that elementary schools and playgrounds attract pedophiles: these institutions provide access to victims. Ministry fills narcissistic supply needs through instant power and respect for the office of clergy. We believe that few other positions would be as attractive to the narcissist. Where else but in the clergy role are people instantly and automatically given authority to tell people how to lead their lives on a regular basis under the imprimatur of God and holy writ, are invited into parishioner homes and their counsel sought during the most intimate and difficult life situations, and where they can fit scripture to meet their desires and ego needs?

Likewise, the hypothesis that pastors with NPD would engage in markedly fewer spiritual disciplines and interactive ministry practices is also supported.

The finding that almost one-third of all active clergy within the Presbyterian Church in Canada appear to have diagnosable Narcissistic Personality Disorder (overt or covert) is deeply disturbing. The prophet Micah states, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God!" (Micah 6:8 NIV) As long as those with balanced narcissistic tendencies can struggle to act justly, love mercy and walk with God they can be a power to make positive change. However, given the characteristics of overt and covert NPD, this injunction would appear to be an insurmountable hurdle for 31.2% of active PCC clergy who appear to have diagnosable Narcissistic Personality Disorder. This indicates a level of mental illness that is at destructive levels on the whole of the organization rather than isolated instances. The implications are huge. The requirements of Micah 6:8 and Jesus' commands to love and pray for one's enemies, to practice humility, to forgive and to put others first are foreign to the pastor with NPD. It is not known what effects these high levels have on shrinking congregations, or if there is a connection, but it should be investigated.

It is unlikely that the overt NPD pastor can remain hidden. His grandiosity and need for adulation eventually become caustic enough that it is likely the people under or over him will resist and work to deny narcissistic supply by dismissing or pressuring him or her to leave—if they are not driven out first by narcissistic abuse. This may be the reason for the large percentage (57%) of NPD's located in the grouping of those who are currently not in active ministry but who have not retired.

The constant need for recognition as an authoritative expert, the lack of empathy, the need to be right, the inability to forgive, the drive for revenge and the willingness to manipulate, use, and throw away parishioners is the antithesis of Christ. It poisons the gospel message and destroys faith in God and in each other. Whether or not the percentage of NPD pastors, both overt and covert, is directly connected to the fact that 20+ percent of all churches are experiencing internal conflict at any given time (Roozen 2008, 26) is not yet known, but it makes sense that there would be a strong correlation.

The NPD pastor is like a spiritual and emotional vampire, taking from others what he needs without regard to their health, wellbeing, or even survival. One must wonder at how many people are driven out, never to return, from churches annually, and the Church overall, by these pastors.

Particularly damaging is the narcissist's lack of empathy. Ministry on a parish level requires deep expressions of genuine empathy, which the narcissist is incapable of producing. Thus, the narcissist pastor's display of empathy is an act designed to manipulate others into giving what is most needed: narcissistic supply of gratitude, admiration, importance, and being needed. While capable

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of appearing empathetic for a time, the narcissist pastor is incapable of continuing the performance in the end and will attack and discard the individual parishioner who no longer provides adequate supply or who sees through the empathic façade and challenges him or her on their sincerity.

Equally damaging is the narcissist's need for a scapegoat on whom to vent his or her rage. Since the narcissist pastor cannot conceive of being wrong or making a mistake, he or she must always have someone else to blame for what goes wrong (Hotchkiss, 6). Often that scapegoat is a subordinate who the narcissist will isolate and attack relentlessly until the subordinate leaves, at which time another scapegoat is needed (Lerner, 60). If there is no subordinate, the narcissist pastor is likely to find multiple parishioners to attack one or two at a time. The attacks leave the targeted individuals bewildered, discouraged, and sometimes with their faith destroyed (Harbinson, 58). In one large church, every member of the staff had written a resignation letter and the Associate Pastor was questioning his call to ministry. In another, a long-term senior pastor with covert NPD had hired and then driven out 21 associate pastors; only one is still in ministry.

Narcissistic rage must not be minimized, for it "has a special unforgiving quality. It is striking how this rage can live on in the unconscious, seemingly untouched by events that follow the wounding situation. Years after the fact, one can be astonished to experience the rage anew, as if the precipitating event had just taken place" (Schwartz-Salant, 41). This rage does not diminish over time and, when coupled with narcissistic envy, produces a viciousness that is intended to destroy a perceived opponent, even though the targeted individual has not intentionally done anything to deserve this treatment (41).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

We have only scratched the surface and have perhaps raised more questions than we have answered. Obviously, it would be beneficial for the Church to reduce the rates of NPD within clergy. Treatment should be an option (Kernberg & Yeomans 2013, 17) though incredibly challenging since narcissists generally cannot conceive that there might be anything wrong with them; it is such a huge threat to their fragile egos that the idea itself must be summarily rejected. We conclude through the lens of experience that dealing with narcissism at NPD levels relies on many of the same steps one must use in diagnosing and treating any form of cancer: early detection, aggressive and quick removal of the problem, and appropriate long-term treatment and follow up are needed. One of the greatest challenges of NPD is the inability of the afflicted individual to admit he or she has a problem and seek help. Nevertheless, ways of encouraging narcissistic pastors to seek treatment should be explored.

Appropriate and timely interventions would also appear to be essential, otherwise the narcissist is allowed to run roughshod until a congregation is deeply wounded or even destroyed. While the tie between congregation and narcissist pastor may need to be severed, particular care must be taken to ensure the healing of the congregation. While the statistical likelihood of a pastor regaining mental health after suffering NPD is small, it must be remembered that all things are possible with God. Therefore, safeguards must be placed to protect the wounded pastor, and attempts made towards restoration (Gal. 6: 1-2)—but without placing parishioners in further danger.

We recommend that studies be done to explore and identify procedural and testing protocols to catch early indices of narcissism in ministerial candidates, and urge them to seek a different profession. This should be done at the seminary, Bible school, denominational, and individual church levels.

We likewise recommend that the connection between narcissistic clergy and destructive conflict in the churches they serve be studied. It is proposed that there is a direct link between high rates of pastoral narcissism and church conflict. If that is the case, then church conflict interventionists

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should be trained to recognize the symptoms of overt and covert NPD, and develop effective interventions accordingly.

There are no panaceas. Within the Presbyterian Church in Canada, three in ten congregations today have a minister with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, which is one of the most difficult mental disorders to treat. If these figures are extrapolated by percentage of clergy, every congregation has the potential of having a minister with NPD at some point in time. Now extrapolate our findings to the United States. Conservative estimates are that there are roughly 300,000–350,000 churches in the United States. If the percentages hold true, 96,300–112,350 congregations in the United States are pastored by clergy with diagnosable Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

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