

Are you avoiding someone at church?

By [Margaret J. Marcuson](#)

November 12, 2012

In ministry, we all have people we love to spend time with. They are the people who constantly support us, who are positive and easy to be around, or who we simply have good chemistry with.

And then there are the others. The people who rub us the wrong way. The people who are difficult. And those who simply have a different perspective on where the leaders should be taking the church.

Ed Bacon, rector of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena and author of [Eight Habits of Love](#), offered some interesting thoughts on this a few years ago when I interviewed him. He suggested that you actually go right to “your biggest problem, or the people you are tempted to avoid, and ask some questions.” It’s counter-intuitive to lean toward the people you want to avoid, but there’s wisdom in it. It forces you to manage some of your own reactivity, to get on the other side of your twitchiness toward that individual.

It’s easy to think that the problem is in the other person, but when I want to avoid someone, something is going on in me. It always takes two to cause a relationship problem.

Here are three suggestions for relating to those who you want to avoid:

1. Don’t take their so-called resistance or criticism too seriously. Edwin Friedman used to call criticism a form of pursuit – if people are critical of you, it’s because they want to get close to you.
2. Find some neutral way to connect with them. If they have a pastoral need, show up. Or ask about their vacation or their grandchildren.
3. Pray for them. Even if you can’t quite manage a conversation or initiate a connection, at least offer their name to God in prayer. Over time, you may find your own attitude shifting.

What are ways you have found to connect with those who are a challenge?

*Originally posted at Marcuson Leadership Circle*