

Winsome Conviction: Disagreeing without Dividing the Church **Tim Muehlhoff & Rick Langer**

Has your Church Become an Echo Chamber Where Groupthink Flourishes?

Groupthink occurs when people view controversial issues as tests of group loyalty. Wavering from the viewpoint of the group is seen as *betrayal*. Listening to the other side is considered to be the equivalent of agreeing with the other side. Considering creative solutions to a problem is viewed as compromise. When members of a congregation engage in groupthink, division will follow swiftly on its heels. Therefore, pastors should be careful to identify the signs of group think and be quick to address it.

Symptoms of Groupthink

Overestimate the ability of the group: Groupthink starts to take root when individuals think the opinions of the group are *all* that is needed.

Isolated groups: While deliberation is key to group decision making, groupthink emerges when differing perspectives are not only avoided, but not welcome. Such isolation often breeds harsh stereotypes of other groups.

Loyalty is the highest value: When a group adopts a life-or-death approach to an issue within your church, the litmus test for the group is unwavering commitment. There is no room for neutral parties, or even third-party moderators.

Preventing Groupthink

Select a leader who solicits differing opinions. Does the leader of your group not only welcome differing viewpoints, but seek them out? How does she react to those who object to the direction your group is heading?

Adopt rules in how you talk about other groups: Behind closed doors, how does your group talk about others? Loving our brothers and sisters in Christ requires talking about other groups within the church that disagree in a way that is respectful and fairly represents their perspective.

Invite feedback from outsiders: Rather than imagining what others think, allow people outside your group to speak for themselves. Remember, that opening yourself to feedback doesn't mean that you'll have to act on every recommendation.

Avoid all or nothing thinking. At all costs try to avoid producing divisions that threaten unity. Those immersed in groupthink slowly adopt an attitude that it is better the church closes its doors than for their group lose this fight. Remember, in the end, unity is more important to winning arguments (Rom. 12:10).