

Three lessons mainline pastors can take from Mark Driscoll's resignation

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For mainline pastors, the Driscoll saga—the conflict at Seattle's Mars Hill Church leading to the resignation of superstar pastor Mark Driscoll—can seem like a number of things: an entertaining but irrelevant sideshow, a distraction from the real work of God's kingdom, or the long-overdue fall of someone whose theological views and ideology are so different from ours. We feel so distant from Driscoll and what he stands for that we can almost watch with bemused smiles.

And it's just this sense of distance that might keep us from seeing this situation the way we should: as a cautionary tale.

The chasm between social positions and theological convictions does not erase the leadership dangers common to us all. Neither does the gap in the size of our churches. From a mainline vantage point, it's easy to forget: none of us is immune to Driscoll's leadership mistakes. We should learn wherever we can.

Here are a few things we can learn.

Success comes in many shapes, but no success gives us the right to lead like a bully. Maybe we think, "I'm not a big church pastor; I would never act like Driscoll." But even our small "successes"—a larger-than-average Sunday worship attendance, a stellar sermon series, a wildly successful stewardship campaign, (insert your own small success here: _____)—can chip away at humility and make us feel invulnerable. No success gives us the right to run roughshod over others. Beware the corrosive power of successes, even small ones.

Arrogance is a crime against the way of Christ. Driscoll said in his resignation letter that he was never charged with "criminal activity, immorality, or heresy." All the charges were about his personality and leadership style, he said. But "leadership style" is a way of saying "this is less serious"—and while arrogance and abuse of power may not be technically criminal, they are crimes against the way of Christ and what Christ expects from pastor-shepherds. Beware thinking that problems of leadership style are not serious.

Authoritarian leadership is over. The only justifying logic for authoritarian leadership is that the ends somehow justify the means. But in God's *ecclesia* this does not hold, because the way God's church and its leaders exist in the world *is* the end. The temptation to authoritarian leadership—especially in the painful situations of decline that many churches face—is great. The temptation is great to take the reins, to make something happen, to manufacture success. Beware creeping authoritarianism.

The temptations of success, arrogance, and authoritarianism—these are not peculiar to large-church pastors, controversial figures, or folks with theological positions different from our own. They are not other people's problems. They are temptations lurking at our doors—whether we're rural pastors, liberal mainliners, progressive activists, trendy church-planters, or evangelical superstars.

Perhaps we should wipe the sly grins off of our faces and heed the warnings of this cautionary tale.