

Curbing Cursing Not Easy in Today's Culture

A town in Massachusetts made headlines last year when it attempted to ban profanity.

Protesters descended on the small community of Middleborough to voice their disapproval—using words television stations often had to bleep out. The controversy arose when residents at a town hall meeting voted to impose a \$20 fine on anyone caught cursing in a public place. The Massachusetts attorney general later ordered the town's leaders to rescind the measure.

Kenn Bongiorno, senior pastor at Christian Fellowship Center (Assemblies of God) in nearby New Bedford, says he can understand people's frustration at the pervasiveness of filthy talk in public settings.

"Making a law doesn't change anybody's heart," Bongiorno says. "But residents were upset they couldn't take their families anywhere without hearing profanity. This could be any town."

Foul language is hard to avoid these days. Television programs, motion picture dialogue, music lyrics and even book narratives are often peppered with expletives. One study of best-selling young adult literature found the popular characters in novels were the most likely to curse.

Then there's the office. In a CareerBuilder survey last year, more than half the workers polled said they swear on the job. Of that group, 95 percent curse in front of co-workers, and 51 percent let four-letter words fly within earshot of supervisors. Roughly 1 in 4 bosses and workers said they had directed cursing toward their employees or co-workers.

Sadly, many home environments are no better. In a survey by ,

eight out of 10 parents admitted to cursing in front of their children. Fifty-four percent said their kids had cursed in front of them as well.

According to Melissa Mohr, who recently wrote a book on the history of cursing, 0.7 percent of the words the average person speaks each day are swear words. Mohr says people use first-person plural pronouns—such as *our*, *ourselves* and *we*—at about the same rate.

Steven Knapp, a public schoolteacher, says he frequently hears kids using profanity as they stroll the halls.

“Unfortunately, swearing is part of the culture some students live in,” says Knapp, who attends Life Church (AG) in Emporia, Kan. “They hear it at home, with their friends and in the entertainment they watch and listen to. They are inundated with swearing.”

Timothy Jay, a psychology professor at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, says kids curse more often—and at an earlier age—than they did a few decades ago. Jay, who is considered an academic expert on cursing, says it is no longer uncommon for children to begin swearing as soon as they can talk, and they use foul language frequently by the time they reach 3 or 4 years of age. Numerous YouTube videos seem to document this phenomenon, depicting cherub-faced toddlers uttering shockingly obscene expletives.

June Moore, a Christian author who has written several books on etiquette, including *Manners Made Easy for the Family*, says kids who use profanity may struggle as adults.

“They may never know their bad language is why they didn’t get hired or didn’t get a promotion,” says Moore, who lives in Little Rock, Ark. “Curse words are not respectful to anyone, and they do nothing to help a person gain respect.”

According to the CareerBuilder survey, cussing a blue streak

at work is a bad idea. Sixty-four percent of employers said they think less of an employee who repeatedly uses curse words, and 57 percent said they would be less likely to promote someone who swears in the office.

“It can definitely be a detriment to a person’s career and cause people to lose respect for you,” says Kerry Woodson, an adjunct business professor at Southwestern Assemblies of God University in Waxahachie, Texas. “It reveals an inability to articulate properly, a lack of self-control and a small vocabulary.”

Bongiorno says he is saddened when he hears of Christians using foul speech and invoking God’s name in a disrespectful manner.

“Swearing is wrong, but if people aren’t Christians they don’t know any better,” Bongiorno says. “When you become a Christian, you’ve got the Holy Spirit in you. You should be speaking words that are edifying and build people up.

“We don’t have to curse to be relevant to the culture. I can’t ever see that being right. Ephesians 4:29 says, ‘Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths’ (NIV). If there’s cursing and swearing, it’s all about anger and bitterness. God wants to heal all of that.”

George O. Wood, general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, says foul speech is related to deeper spiritual issues.

“In Matthew 12:34 and Luke 6:45, Jesus said, ‘The mouth speaks what the heart is full of,’ ” Wood says. “The problem with profanity is that it is the symptom of a sin-sick heart—a heart diseased by things like anger, hatred and lust. But those are precisely the heart diseases Jesus wants to cure us of.”

Wood says the best remedies for a foul speech habit are an encounter with the Holy Spirit and a close, personal

relationship with Jesus Christ.

“Cure the heart, and the symptoms disappear,” Wood says. “Fill your life with patience, love and holiness, and there’s no reason or cause to use profanity.”

This article originally appeared in Pentecostal Evangel.