

AUC Ministerial Association

Group Discussion Guide



Leading Through Conflict

Why do you think conflict happens so often in church environments?

- **If you're comfortable sharing, give a short overview of a ministry conflict you have worked through. How did it turn out? What lessons did you learn? With hindsight, how might you have gone about things in a different way? Were you able to see God working through the process?**
- **If a brand new pastor were to ask you your top three tips for dealing with conflict in the church what would be your answer?**
- **What is your favourite example of how Jesus dealt with difficult people and how has this example shaped your ministry?**

Conflict carries within it an inherent danger that the spiritual enemy loves to fan the flames of conflict as to divide good people and shatter their ability to accomplish great things.

In our business meetings, it is important that precious time should not be consumed in debating points that are of small consequence. The habit of petty criticism should not be indulged... It is our duty to study, daily and hourly, how we may answer the prayer of Christ, that His disciples may be as one, as He and the Father are one. Precious lessons may be learned by keeping our Saviour's prayer before the mind, and by acting our part to fulfil His desire (Ellen G White 'Gospel Workers' 447)

"God isn't at work producing the circumstances I want. God is at work in bad circumstances to produce the me He wants." John Ortberg

Resolved: that all men should live for the glory of God
Resolved second: that whether others do or not, I will.
Jonathan Edwards

Qualifications of a pastor:
The mind of a scholar,
The heart of a child,
And the hide of a rhinoceros
Stuart Briscoe

Those who occupy important positions, who are brought in contact with souls for whom Christ has died, should place upon men the estimate God has placed upon them and regard them as precious (Ellen G White, 'Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers' p224)

Pre-wiring For Conflict

Conflict seems inevitable in the church and handled wisely can bring about growth. The best time to put in place systems for dealing with conflict is when all seems well. Here are some ideas for 'pre-wiring' to deal with conflict.

Ken Sande, 'Pre-emptive Peace' – (Leadership Magazine Winter 2011)

- To survive conflict, churches and pastors must prepare before one arises. Put structures in place that foster accountability and allow conflicts to be dealt with when everyone is getting along well.
- Once we are in conflict it's very difficult to put in place the structures we need.
- Believe what you preach about the nature of sin – we are not perfect which ensures that at some point we will need to deal with conflict.
- Put in place accountability systems – you need to be prepared for sin to infect your leadership team at some point.
- Train all of your leadership in peacemaking so that when you end up in conflict you already have agreed methods of handling it.
- During a conflict church leaders generally go in one of two unhealthy directions – People pleasers or control.
- Often conflicts are pitched as theological differences over doctrine. Look for what might really be going on.
- Remain humble – humility is vital!
- Remember that the only way to carry on a meaningful discussion is in the context of relationship. Preserving the relationship is crucial: listening, being kind, and forbearing – even if the other person is wrong.
- Always remain teachable – lead by example.
- Be approachable
- Selection process for key leaders is vital. “I don't ask people what they're going to do in a leadership role. I ask them what's happened in the past, because that's an indicator. What are the relationships like there?”
- Chart conflict on a graph – the intensity, the number of people involved, and the emotional level. Is the curve rising? Has it plateaued?
- Seek Counsel. Have a healthy scepticism of your own objectivity in a conflict. Confide in someone you can trust, outside of the conflict, and ask for their perspective.
- The most frequent mistake pastors make in the midst of conflict is to use the pulpit as leverage for their position. Preaching in a conflict is like walking through a minefield.
What you can do is talk about general concepts: Humility, being open to correction, seeking forgiveness, speaking truth in love, loving even our enemies, looking for ways to serve others.

- Email: Whatever you say or whatever you write about in an email or online, to the best of your ability communicate in a way that you will not be embarrassed or ashamed if (when!) it is publicly distributed.
- Never use email to communicate delicate personal issues.
- Be careful of 'defending' yourself against online criticism. It gives more fuel to the situation, your words are used against you and it usually solves very little.

“God wants His people to be united in the closest bonds of Christian fellowship; confidence in our brethren is essential to the prosperity of the church; union of action is important in a religious crisis. One imprudent step, one careless action, may plunge the church into difficulties and trials from which it many not recover for years.” (Ellen G White 'Testimonies' 446)

Leading People in a Healthy Way

Attitudes That Shape Healthy Conflict and Limit The Potential and Damage of Unhealthy Conflict.

Ken Blanchard 'The Heart of a Leader – Insights on the Art of Influence' David Cook, 2009

- The key to developing people is to catch them doing something right.
- Don't wait until people do things exactly right before you praise them.
- Feedback is the breakfast of champions.
- No one can make you feel inferior without your permission.
- No one of us is as smart as all of us.
- Get your ego out of the way and move on.
- Never punish a learner.
- When you stop learning, you stop growing.
- When you stop learning, your stop leading.
- Nice guys may appear to finish last, but usually they are running in a different race.
- If you want to know why your people are not performing well, step up to the mirror and take a peek.
- People with humility don't think less of themselves, they just think of themselves less.
- Good thoughts in your head that are not communicated mean 'squat.'
- Love is being able to say you're sorry.
- Without a change in your behaviour, just saying, "I'm sorry" is not enough.
- Take what you do seriously but yourself lightly.
- The cure for too much to do is solitude and silence.
- Vision is a lot more than putting a plaque on the wall. A real vision is lived, not framed.

- If God had wanted us to talk more than listen, He would have given us two mouths rather than two ears.
- People without information cannot act responsibly. People with information are compelled to act responsibly.
- Let people bring their brains to work, and let them use their knowledge.
- It's surprising how much you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit.
- Take responsibility for making relationships work.
- Core values must be communicated.
- Embody the values.

Deal With It

Many pastors are conflict avoiders. We become super-nice and convivial, by taking care to say nothing that might offend or create controversy and quickly backing down when opposed. Gordon MacDonald

- **Why do you think so many pastors are conflict avoiders?**
- **How do you think we can balance humility with still telling the truth in love?**
- "One of the ironies of crises is that often we have them because we feel we have no time – only to find that when the crisis hits we suddenly have nothing else"
- If there is not enough time to deal with small crises, then eventually the pace of your life will create a large one. Then you will have time.
- Crisis can produce deeper roots
- Is it possible that we actually need adversity and setbacks – maybe even crisis and trauma – to reach the fullest level of development and growth

Dealing with Opposition

- Anyone who is trying to do something for God will face some opposition.
- You will be criticized. It might as well be for doing the right thing
- The reality is that criticism and opposition will drive you somewhere. "Let it drive you closer to God and you will become better; let it drive you away from God and you will become bitter."
- Keep on leading. "You can define the greatness of a man by what it takes to discourage him."
- Don't let the whiners set the agenda of your church. Don't let the complainers have the time that you need to be giving to the workers.

- The angrier you are about a complaint, the more sensitive you need to be in your response,
- You can measure a leader's maturity by how he/she responds to complainers.

Dealing with Difficult People

- Pray lots for them
- Remember the biotic principle of energy transformation. They are putting energy into the church – can it be harnessed for good?
- Maintain an open relationship. See the church and its perceived problems from their viewpoint
- Ensure that the way the church is moving is well communicated.
- Engage in discussion prior to decisions through articles, informal discussions etc.
- Think through what need for them is being met by being difficult and put in place a plan that might grow that person and address the need in more healthy ways.
- Think through the influence map of people in your church. Who does the difficult person influence? Who might they listen to?
- Make decisions based on ministry analysis and ask the difficult person to think and pray about how the problem should be addressed?
- Ask probing questions that cause the complaining person to think through the issues from another perspective. Questions serve to catalyse and challenge the thinking process.

Resolving Conflict

Steps to Resolving Conflict:

1. Accept that conflict – the collision of two or more perspectives – is a necessary ingredient of any human relationship.
2. Recognize that each of us brings 'baggage' from past experiences into present dealings. Past fears or hurts or humiliations are likely to influence present circumstances. So when I feel irritable or angry at someone, I try searching my memory: are any issues from my past injecting themselves into my present?
3. Conflict need not be – and should not be – about winning or losing. Conflict should be an energetic search for a better idea, personal insight or for a more effective way of achieving something.
 "Among the more difficult things I learned about conflict was the assumption that there was probably a kernel of truth in the opinions and positions of those who, while in conflict, might seem for a moment to be my worst enemy."

“Through the years I came to realize that some of the most important insights I gained about myself came not from my friends but from my critics who, while playing rough, nevertheless alerted me to blind spots and inadequacies no one else had the courage to tell me about.”

4. Disagreements of any kind must be limited to the issue.
5. Conflict needs to reach a terminal point where adult versions of ‘sorrys’ are said and solutions found.

“The people of God, with various temperaments and organizations, are brought together in church capacity. The truth of God, received into the heart, will do its work of refining, elevating and sanctifying the life and overcoming the peculiar views and prejudices of each.” (Ellen G White. Testimonies, 3 p43)

Conflict is Your Friend

Patrick Lencioni

Death by Meeting, Jossey-Bass, 2004

- Conflict makes a meeting great.
- Most leaders of meetings seem focused on avoiding tension
- Leaders must look for legitimate reasons to provoke, and uncover relevant, constructive ideological conflict. By doing so they’ll keep people engaged, which leads to more passionate discussions and ultimately to better decisions.
- The truth is, the only thing more painful than confronting an uncomfortable topic is pretending it doesn’t exist. And I believe far more suffering is caused by failing to deal with an issue directly – and whispering about it in the hallways – than by putting it on the table and wrestling with it head on.
- Consensus is usually not achievable. The likelihood of six intelligent people coming to a sincere and complete agreement on a complex and important topic is very low.
Instead
Have a passionate, unfiltered, messy, proactive discussion that ends when the leader of the team decides all the information had been aired. At that point, if no one had made a compelling enough argument for making a decision, the leader breaks the tie.
- Once the decision is made, everyone supports it. That’s why it is critical that no one hold anything back during the discussion.

Conflict and Church Culture

Conflict often happens when a leader tries to make a change that goes against 'church culture'. Understanding the culture of congregation is vital to be able to avoid unnecessary conflict and lead through conflict in a healthy way.

Every church has a culture that is most times not clearly defined yet broadly understood. The congregation seems to know the square it can work in without conflict however step outside of the square and there are very powerful forces that kick in to bring you back to what is 'acceptable'.

"Culture is the shared software of our minds." Geert Hofstede

Church Culture

"Culture is the most important social reality in your church. Though invisible to the untrained eye, its power is undeniable. Culture gives colour and flavour to everything your church is and does. Like a powerful current running through your church, it can move you inland or take you father out to sea. It can prevent your church's potential from ever being realized, or – if used by the Holy Spirit – it can draw others in and reproduce healthy spiritual life all along the way."

Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift*

- To make any kind of transition as a church, your church's culture can't be ignored.
- Great ideas go nowhere if the culture is unreceptive.
- Your church can have the best programs in the world, but deep-rooted change won't happen without the right culture shift
- Your culture is the lens through which you view your life. If you change the lens you change your outlook.
- "Ultimately our church culture resides not in buildings, programs, or printed proclamations but in people who say, 'This is what God wants us to become'"
- Even if you have not yet identified your church's culture, others have.
- Culture announces its identity through everything you do. The values of your culture – stated or unstated, thought out or unintentional – shape the feel, behaviour, and attitude of a congregation more than anything else.

Shifting Church Culture

1 - Change Starts With You

The hardest person to lead is yourself.

Are you living the change you want to see in others?

How you think about your church determines what you see and the culture you create. Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift*

2 – Change Is About Growing People

Church leaders need to continually remember that the source of vitality in the church is not its structures or processes, but its connection with the Godhead. Spiritual vitality is central to effective structural renewal.

Spiritual Growth is the big change

“Practices can be imitated, passion cannot. Unless practices emerge out of deep passion, they are little more than sound and fury – motion without effect. In this case, passion is kindled only in the midst of a white-hot love relationship with God. Knowing Him, His heart, yields passion. Pursuing what is on His heart informs practice.”

Milfred Minatrea, “Shaped By God’s Heart”

3 – Pray and Think Through What Really Needs To Change

Change is not so much about a new programme but growing people to think right. The big changes for a church include:

- Implementing a spiritual growth process
- Shaping an environment of prayer
- Moving people from consumers to community
- Focusing people outward rather than inward
- Establishing an equipping culture
- Implementing systems that include governance and accountability

4 – Remember That Change Takes Time

Culture change takes at least three years and most times five

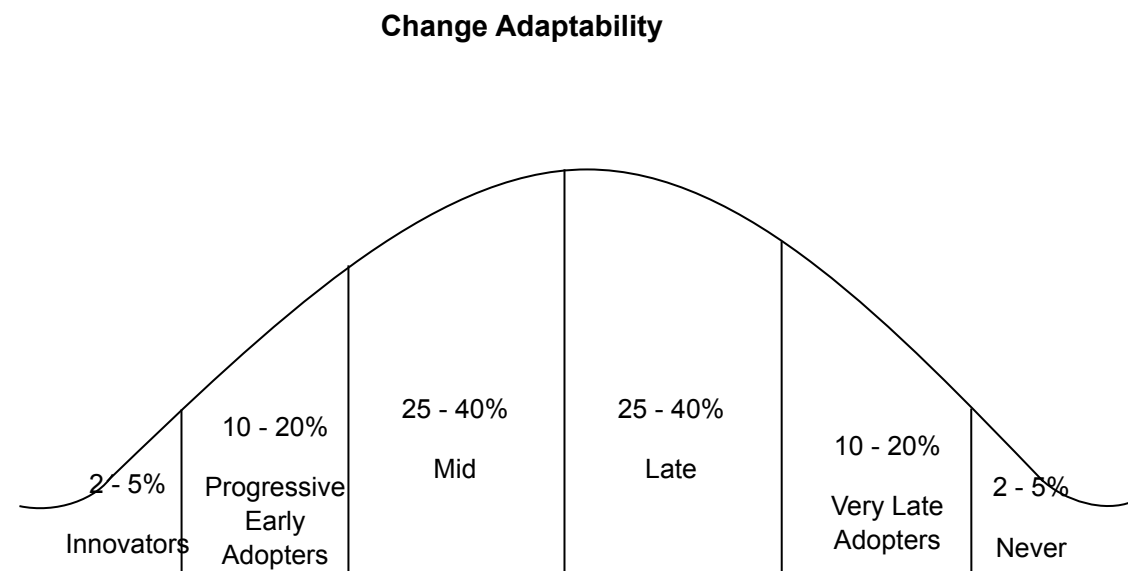
Pray and Think through the systemic changes you want to make and start teaching, leading for and modelling it now so that you can make the change in two years time.

5 - How Much Change Do You Have?

Even 'good' change costs you. Change is built up by credibility over time, trust, effective previous change, relationship or positive momentum. If you have built up \$20 worth of change then you can buy two \$10 changes or 20 \$1 changes however push back happens when you try and buy \$21!

The art is to be able to determine how much change you have in your pocket.

6 – People Respond To Change at Different Rates



- People can only handle so much change
- People think first about what they must give up
- People are at different levels of readiness for change
- People tend to revert back to their old behaviour the minute the reason for change is removed.

7 – Great Communication is Vital

Many times change is hindered by a simple lack of communication. When leaders act as though they have something to hide and do not value

congregational opinion, then problems arise. In an environment of participatory decision-making, people trust the leadership.

People need to know and feel why they are changing

People need to know and feel the cost of not changing

- A high level of communication is essential to renewal because informed people are easier to motivate and will cooperate more readily with each other in achieving church goals.
- People are far more willing to cooperate when they feel that they are working in a culture of openness and trust. This culture is often a function of communication.
- Good communication helps to relieve alienated feelings over cliques or power bases which are perceived as in 'control' of the church. It also allows people the opportunity to make decisions from a more informed point of view.
- Communication systems must be put in place that allow for information distribution and feedback. Feedback is of special importance in helping decide the rate at which change should be introduced.
- Information distribution lets the church know what decisions are being worked through and why these decisions need to be made.
- Most people do not want to be involved in every decision. However, they do want to be assured that decisions are made in an accountable, open environment and that all factors are being considered.

Change & Size Transitions

Dragons (destructive people) thrive when the church's formal authority and informal power structure don't match.

The most severe and potentially damaging tensions are those caused by pastors and individuals on the leadership team who relate to the church according to the wrong size category (Gary Macintosh, 'One Size Doesn't Fit All')

1. Congregations fall into distinctive size categories and congregations of different sizes organise in different ways.
 2. Congregations do not grow or decline smoothly, but tend to plateau at certain predictable sizes.
 3. In order to successfully grow past a plateau, a congregation must deliberately break with familiar patterns of behaviour and begin to act as larger congregation acts.
- A church's size category is a matter of attitude as much as numbers.
 - Size transition is a lot like standing on a fault line with a foot on each moving plate.
 - To cross over into a new stage, leaders must understand what lies ahead and make the necessary realignments before they expect to move to a new level of growth.
 - Vision casting is especially important in the transition phases. There must be a clearly articulated plan in regard to what, when and how.

Expected changes:

- Church structure
- Leadership styles
- Communication
- Facility

Factors to Be Worked Through:

- Congregations self-definition
- Pastor's role
- How decisions are made
- Size and function of paid staff
- Facility capacity
- Movement toward multi-cell reality
- Delegation of planning

- Change management
- Infrastructure for member care and involvement
- Conflict prevention and management

Phases to be worked through in decline:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance
- Death

"The Death and Dying of a Congregation" in *Size Transitions*. Alice Mann ed Alban, 2002

Regardless of whether the congregation chooses to become larger as one groups or grow lots of smaller congregations the ways of thinking and acting at different stages are important.

- Education produces Liberation
- Communication produces Cooperation
- Expectation is Invitation

Fletcher, *Overcoming Barriers to Growth*, 96-101

- Assess where you are.
- Communicate with the team.
- Anticipate the tension "prewire the crisis"
- Get leadership team on the same page and develop a plan

Family Church: Up to 50 members

- Matriarchs and patriarchs are the central figures
- Pastor needs to be the consultant to the matriarchs/patriarchs
- Factors:
- Growth threatens closeness and informal influence networks. Can the 'in' people handle not being 'in'.
- Change from 'I' to 'we'

Pastoral: 50-150

- Pastor is master coordinator
- Pastor is the manager of the various parental figures
- Good communication with the congregation and the ability of the pastor to delegate authority, assign responsibility and recognise the accomplishments of others are important. "Without such skill the central pastoral function weakens the entire structure. The

clergyperson becomes overworked, isolated, exhausted and may be attacked by other leaders.” *Size Transitions 35*

- When congregations get 130-150 people they begin to get nervous because they are beginning to lose the intimate fellowship the prize so highly.
- “If clergy have the idea firmly fixed in their head that they are ineffective as a pastor unless they can relate in a profound and personal way with every member of the parish than 150 active members (plus an even larger number of inactive members) are about all one person can manage” *Size Transitions 36*
- The transition from pastoral to program is considered the most difficult. Many churches make an unconscious decision not to make the transition and keep hovering around 150. They are not willing to lose ready access to their ‘religions leader’ and the feeling of oneness where everyone knows everyone else.
- People must accept they will not be able to know everyone in the church
- The people will have to become inclusive of others and unwritten rules will have to be supplanted with clear methods of communication

Program: 150-350

- Empowered leaders who function as shepherds

What members need from the pastor:

- Planning with other leaders to ensure high quality ministries
- Good recruitment, training, supervision and evaluation to grow leaders
- Keep the morale of the leaders high and give high priority to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the leaders.
- The pastor must often step back from direct ministry with people to coordinate and support the people who offer this ministry.
- Clear direction is vital
- For clergy who get their primary kicks out of direct pastoral care work, ministry in a program-size church may leave them with a chronic feeling of flatness and lack of fulfilment.

Corporation: 350 plus

- Multiples mini-congregations of various sizes
- There is leadership on many levels
- The worship service is a big deal

Pastor:

- Must coordinate multiple staff in a healthy way
- Must coordinate diverse groups around the mission
- High level of administrative skills
- **Can you think of any examples where the church's formal and informal authority structures have not matched. What are the implications and do you have any ideas for working through this situation?**
- **Can you think of occasions where relating to the congregation out of the wrong size has caused conflict. How do you think this sort of conflict can be addressed?**

Useful Resources

Arthur Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks – Healthy Responses To Difficult Behaviour*. Alban, (The Alban Institute, 1999).

Michael Fletcher, *Overcoming Growth Barriers*, Bethany, 2006.

Randy Frazee, *The Comeback Congregation*. Abingdon 1995

Beth Ann Gaede, ed. *Size Transitions in Congregations*, Alban, 2001

Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift*, Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Gary McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, Revell, 1999.

Alice Mann, *The In-Between Church, Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations*, Alban, 1998.

Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, *How To Change Your Church Without Killing It*, Thomas Nelson, 2000.

Dan Southerland, *Transitioning – Leading Your Church Through Change*, Zondervan, 1999.

Peter Scazzero with Warren Bird 'The Emotionally Healthy Church' Zondervan

Dan Southerland, *Transitioning – Leading Your Church Through Change*, Zondervan, 1999.