Conflict Management in Christian Communities

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Table of Contents

Objectives and Overview
Why bother studying conflict.................................................................3
Why does conflict in the church cause such harm?
The nature of christian communities, leadership and conflict ..................4
Common Causes of Conflict..................................................................6
Assessing Conflict .................................................................................7
Interpersonal Conflict Resolution...........................................................8
Knowing our own styles of interpersonal conflict ...................................8
Dealing Wisely with Difficult People......................................................11
Conflict ground rules............................................................................13
Steps toward Relational Reconciliation................................................15
Guidelines for personal involvement in reconciliation..........................18
Managing disagreements through mediation.........................................19
Facilitating Parish Conflict as a Leader ..................................................23
Overview of the Church Conflict Process..............................................24
Systemic Factors in Communal Conflict...............................................25
Understanding Church Systems............................................................26
Five levels of congregational conflict...................................................27
Polarities to Manage vs Problems to Solve...........................................31
Minister – Congregation Relations Group...........................................32
Equipping a congregation to deal with conflict:.................................33
Preparation for Conflict and Policy Formation.....................................34
Sample Grievance Procedure...............................................................35
Biblical Reflections ..............................................................................37
Matthew 18:15-20..............................................................................37
Acts 6:1-7............................................................................................38
Acts 15...............................................................................................39
Objectives and Overview

Why bother studying conflict….

1. Conflict is unavoidable and should be anticipated by leaders committed to serving a growing Christian community.

2. Christians are notoriously poor at dealing with conflict and often cause significant hurt to others through a failure to attend to appropriate processes.

3. The stress caused by poor conflict processes is one of the primary reasons clergy leave the ministry.

Objectives:

1. To enable participants to develop confidence in conflict situations enabling them to be a non-anxious presence and to lead effectively.

2. To provide a range of frameworks for thinking about conflict

3. To provide a range of practical strategies for responding to conflict in both interpersonal relationships and also the broader parish environment

4. To enable parishes to form, and through practice, refine a workable Parish Conflict Management Policy.

Learning Process:

1. Interactive

2. Reflective

3. A note on case studies
Why does conflict in the church cause such harm?  
The nature of christian communities, leadership and conflict

- Brainstorm

What are some of the unique features of conflict within the church setting?
Some of the unique features of conflict in church settings

- Within the church community, individuals have many and varied relationship needs met. E.g. The need for acceptance and being valued, the need for having some influence in a group, including the exercise of power, the need for an intimate, sharing and supportive community. These needs have often created long-standing informal rules and roles in a church community. Challenging or changing these is often both a cause of conflict and a reason it is not resolved quickly.

- In church communities, individuals bring deep faith perspectives that influence their judgements about situations. These may include: E.g. Where and how God or evil may be at work, the purpose and practice of the church as a Christian community, varying values in relation to lifestyle and personal convictions.

- Within the Christian environment there is often a widespread failure to anticipate and normalise conflict. This produces a common 'lack of process' and lack of 'collective wisdom' on how to deal with even simple conflicts. The default processes that Christians assume to be appropriate don't often work well. E.g. Open discussion.

- As a consequence of the above, some churches have histories of denying and minimising conflict unless it becomes a significant issue, then individuals commonly over-react. Christians may actually lack developed mid-range communication and conflict management skills.
  E.g. Communication skills: Listening, sharing, dealing with emotions; Maintaining self control while dealing with conflict. Knowing how to handle gossip.

- Also a consequence of the above, people may struggle to trust where they have been hurt in the past or where they perceive that there is not an open commitment to honesty.

- There is a tendency within some Christian communities to overuse the demand for forgiveness at the expense of justice. This can lead to an 'under the carpet' approach to conflict.

- Others....
Common Causes of Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in all human communities. There are differences that emerge based on interpretation of facts, values and beliefs, practices and how roles should be performed.

Conflict occurs when:

1. There is a lack of communication. Some conflict managers believe that up to 80% of conflict is caused by failure to communicate clearly. Disagreements commonly occur more over perceived differences rather than real ones. When assumptions have been put aside and individuals have listened to one another they find that the conflict has not been based on accurate information. Failure to fully share ideas and feelings on one side and failure to fully listen on the other, allows people to "fill in the gap." People "read in" what they think the other person's motive or plan might be. Out of fear, people often suspect negative intent which provokes anxiety, leading them to worry and anticipate the worst. As a result, trust is further eroded and misunderstanding deepens.

2. There is a difference in values. When individuals with different attitudes, beliefs and expectations are placed together in groups or teams, their differences surface in the challenge of serving together. If these differences are not appreciated, understood and discussed they invariably create severe conflict over goals, methods and processes. The process of clarifying values is essential to healthy conflict management.

3. There are discrepancies in role expectations. Difficulties can arise if two people see their own and each other's roles and responsibilities differently. For example, if a small group leader's concept of her role and a group members' concept of her role are very different, conflict will arise. Unmet expectations of others is a classic cause of conflict. Expectations in the Christian community are often very high and people often fail to meet them. Individuals with unmet high expectations may begin criticising and end up creating conflict rather than exploring the differences in expectations and why they might exist.

4. Change causes disequilibrium. Groups prefer secure, predictable patterns of relating to one another and stable community life. There needs to be some energy and effort to enable a system to change, however when changes occur abruptly and unpredictably, conflict may follow. Forces may have been at work for a long time to cause such a movement, but if there is a lack of participation and ownership and change appears suddenly, anger, anxiety and confusion can result.

5. Unresolved prior conflict. Many people shy away from dealing with conflict in a healthy way because memories of past conflicts still hurt. Probably the most lasting of those "scars" have been caused by conflicts with those people are closest to--family, close friends, trusted colleagues and in particular, in church communities.
Assessing Conflict
Interpersonal Conflict Resolution
Knowing our own styles of interpersonal conflict

We all have a natural personality based preferred style of dealing with conflict:

**Bulls – the I Win / You Lose paradigm:**
Bulls tend to deal with conflict by bringing others around to their point of view. They are highly committed to what they believe is right and are prepared to go into battle to make sure that their solution is applied. They don’t like disagreement and tend to work towards seeing firm policies applied and clear decisions taken. A distinguishing feature of this power strategy is that resolution of the problem is often unrelated to the relative merits of the arguments (e.g. "You will do what I say because I said it!"). It may take the form of "pulling rank" or simply outmanoeuvring the opposition. Those who tend to this style as their dominant strategy will typically view conflict as having two possible outcomes—winning or losing. Win, and self-esteem or competence is enhanced. Lose or be "wrong", and suffer a loss of status—there is the sense of being incompetent or weak. The result can become an aggressive, dogmatic, inflexible and unreasonable approach to conflict management; one in which the goal is to overcome an adversary.

**Koalas – the I Lose / You Win paradigm:**
Koalas like to deal with conflict by giving in or yielding to others in order to keep the peace. They would rather miss out on their preferred solution to a conflict than cause an upset by communicating their disagreement. They tend to support others and convince themselves that it is not a ‘big deal’ and ‘we will all get over it’. This placate-yield style reflects a concern for the effect of conflict on the well-being and durability of all relationships koala types enter. There is an assumption that persons and relationships can be fragile and cannot endure the trauma of working through genuine differences. So the tendency is to avoid conflict and appease others by ignoring, denying and avoiding conflict. Should differences persist, giving in, placating and submitting to another’s goals are seen as effective means of self and relationship protection. (It's OK, you're right, we'll do it your way...”). One-sided domination in the relationship is the likely outcome of this strategy.

**Turtles – the back off, withdraw and overlook paradigm:**
Withdrawers find it easiest to back right out of conflict situations. Turtles “pull their heads in!” They prefer not to deal with either the issues or the people and like to get to a calm situation as quickly as possible. They often deal with conflict by disappearing or becoming silent. The strategy of overlooking the offence or difference removes the need to engage. Turtles find it more comfortable to deal with their emotions alone. In taking their 'their bat and ball' and going home, they make it impossible for anyone else to play or to resolve the conflict if their presence is needed. There is power in this position as it can bring a halt to either a heated damaging situation but also to a healthy robust resolution process.
Owls – We all win together paradigm:

As a dominant style for conflict management, this approach attaches major importance to both the goals of the parties involved and to the well-being of the relationships. This is a "win-win" outcome and assumes that everyone will enthusiastically co-operate since the positive total effect is greater than what could be achieved by individual efforts. (e.g. If we work hard and pull together, we can achieve each of our goals collaboratively). Tolerance for differences and a recognition of the legitimacy of feelings are central to this strategy. Each individual must agree to abide by the rules of negotiation and agree to solve the conflict constructively. Any "hidden agendas" are brought out in the open so they may be effectively dealt with. Resolvers are prepared to work hard to find the best solution for everyone. They are keen to co-operate, to listen, to share their own views and to find a way through the conflict to a solution that meets everyone's needs. They believe that there is a solution to every conflict and are prepared to work hard to find it. While the style has many attractions, it requires significant amounts of hard work and is often highly energy draining.

Foxes – The ½ way compromise paradigm:

Compromise is a negotiated resolution process based on each person making some concessions to the other (e.g. "If you will give..., I will give..."). Within this style, however, the other person may still be seen as an opponent. Compromise is often seen as a means for making the solution more tolerable to each party. It is a persuasive and often manipulative conflict management style in which both ends are frequently played against the middle in an attempt to serve the "common good" (e.g. Let's all give a little for the "good of the whole group"). Compromisers believe that the middle ground is best. It is good to be reasonable, to give and take, and work out the middle ground so that everyone has at least some of their needs met. Compromisers are comfortable with half way solutions that at least allow a way forward in reasonable time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORCING  (Bull)</th>
<th>COLLABORATING  (Owl)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicates high concern for issue - low concern for relationships</td>
<td>Communicates high concern for issue - high concern for relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies:</strong> Discourage disagreement, persuade, be firm, set limits and consequences, cite policy, insist, repeat, control, be inaccessible.</td>
<td><strong>Strategies:</strong> Assert self while also inviting other views; welcome differences, jointly list strengths and weaknesses of all views, cooperate in seeking additional information.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Source of Power:</strong> From position</td>
<td><strong>Source of Power:</strong> From trust, skill, ability, good will, creativity.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits:</strong> Speed, decisiveness, protection of innocents, preservation of important values, stability</td>
<td><strong>Benefits:</strong> Trust and mutuality in relationships, high cooperation, creativity and growth, others blossom and develop new gifts, energy and joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs when over-used: Destroyed or hierarchical relationships, loss of cooperation, atrophy of gifts in others, anger, depression, and diminished self-respect in others, stagnation.</td>
<td>Costs when over-used: Fatigue and time-loss, distraction from more important tasks, analysis paralysis.</td>
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<tr>
<th>COMPROMISING  (Fox)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Communicates medium concern for issue - medium concern for relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies:</strong> Urge moderation, bargain, split the difference, find a little something for everyone, meet them halfway</td>
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<td><strong>Source of Power:</strong> From moderation and reasonableness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits:</strong> Relatively fast, enables the show to go on, provides a way out of the stalemate, readily understood by most people, builds atmosphere of calmness and reason.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Costs when over-used:</strong> Mediocrity and blandness, possible unprincipled agreements, likelihood of patching symptoms and ignoring causes.</td>
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<tr>
<th>AVOIDING  (Turtle)</th>
<th>ACCOMMODATING  (Koala)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies:</strong> Withdraw, delay or avoid response, divert attention, suppress personal emotions, be inaccessible, be inscrutable.</td>
<td><strong>Strategies:</strong> Agree, support, acknowledge error, give in, convince self it’s no big deal, placate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of Power:</strong> From calmness, silence, non-cooperation, being above-it-all</td>
<td><strong>Source of Power:</strong> From relationships or approval of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits:</strong> Freedom from entanglement in trivial issues or insignificant relationships, stability, preservation of status quo, ability to influence others without doing anything.</td>
<td><strong>Benefits:</strong> Approval /Appreciation of others, freedom from hassle, in the short run at least, self-discipline of ego.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost when over-used:</strong> Periodic explosions out of pent-up anger, freeze out - slow death of relationships, residue of negative feelings, stagnation and dullness, loss of accountability sapped energy</td>
<td><strong>Costs when over-used:</strong> Frustration for others who wish to collaborate, resentment and depression, stunted growth of personal gifts, over dependence on others, denies others benefit of healthy confrontation</td>
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Dealing Wisely with Difficult People

More Effective Interpersonal Confrontation

Very few people enjoy confronting someone else: Even fewer relish being confronted. A primary reason is that our experiences in confrontations have often been very painful. For that reason, most people tend to avoid confrontation at all costs. The result is that unresolved issues fester because no one is willing to deal with them. These "suggestions" are intended to offer guidance in knowing when and how to confront.

When to Confront

Not every issue on which you disagree with someone else merits confrontation, but some certainly do. Not every relationship matters enough to you to justify the emotional energy of confrontation, but some do. A good rule of thumb: When the issue is important and you care a lot about the person it may merit confrontation.

Plan the Confrontation

Effective confrontation requires planning. Think through how you will approach the person, what you will say, how the person might respond. The goal is to prepare yourself spiritually, mentally and emotionally for the confrontation, not to become obsessed with all the possible nuances.

Seek a Safe Environment

The confrontation will more likely result in a positive outcome if the environment feels "safe" to the person you are confronting. Examples of "unsafe" environments: in front of a large group of people, or across from your desk if you are the person's superior. Try to find more informal, neutral or "home" turf for the person you are confronting.

Ask Permission

Most people will respond better to confrontation if you allow them the opportunity to help schedule it. Some personality styles insist on this, and will respond negatively with a demand to "talk about this issue now." A better approach: Inform the person that there is an important issue that you would like to discuss with him or her. Ask when would be a good time to get together and talk about it. The person may respond, "Let's do it right now," but will nonetheless appreciate the opportunity to have declined.

Be "Hard on the Issues, Soft on the Person"

When confronting, it is important to be open about the issues that concern you. "Beating around the bush" is often perceived as manipulative and confusing. But dealing clearly with the issues does not mean you also have to be hard on the person. It is often helpful to (honestly) affirm things you appreciate about the person even while you are identifying issues that concern you. If you are in long-term relationship with that person, affirm your ongoing commitment to that relationship.

Own Your Feelings and Beliefs

During the confrontation, speak for yourself, not for others who aren't there. It is particularly unhelpful to say things like, "Everybody else feels this way about you but doesn't have the courage to tell you. Instead, own your own concerns through the use "I-Statements." An example: "I felt angry and confused last Thursday evening when you said that no-one in our group cared about you. I care a lot about you and it hurt me to hear you say that I don't."
Be Honest About Your Own Preferences
The general reason for confronting is that we are hoping for a change of behaviour in the person we are confronting. Thus, it is generally helpful to be honest about your own preferences, rather than to leave the person guessing as to what you are hoping to see. An example of a preference statement: “I would prefer that in the future you would come to me personally when I do something that concerns you. I’ve found that I respond best when I’m confronted one-on-one, rather than in front of a group.”

Be Prepared to Listen
Any time we confront someone we are asking them to take seriously our concerns. Often these concerns are issues of a personal nature about which the person may feel very strongly. Thus, it is essential that we be prepared to listen to the person after we have shared our concerns. A possible way of helping this to happen: “Thanks for listening so carefully when I shared my concerns with you. I don’t expect you to instantly agree with everything I said, and I really want to hear your perspective.”
Conflict ground rules

Deal with relationship restoration before dealing with the issues
Take time to apologise and to receive an apology for any angry words, misunderstandings, hurts that may have made the relationship tense. These need to be sorted out before the issues can be dealt with.

Agree on what the issues are
Deal with one issue at a time. If more than one issue is presented, agree on the order in which they will be addressed.

Find the right place to sort things out
If you are uncomfortable with the forum or arena in which the conflict is raised, it is legitimate to request and discuss where the most appropriate arena might be.

Follow some basic agreed rules in sharing your thoughts and feelings
Keep the focus of the discussion on issues, relationships, or descriptions of feelings. Inappropriate behaviour in conflict includes, but is not limited to:

- name calling
- mind reading (attributing evil motives)
- blaming, guilt making ("Look how you've made me feel")
- rejecting, deprecating, disparaging, or discrediting another person (especially through absolutes, you never, always etc.)

I feel …..
It is appropriate to share your feelings as well as your ideas. It is not helpful to respond in a detached, withdrawn, aloof, paternal/maternal way.

Why do I feel this way?
In fair conflict all the parties are open to exploration of their own ideas, needs, interests and behaviours as well as the ideas and behaviours of those with whom they are in disagreement. One acknowledges his or her share in creating the conflict or tension.

Listen to understand
Fair conflict responds to the other showing understanding of his or her feelings or position (though not necessarily agreeing with it). Each person’s position makes sense to them. The most valuable step that can be taken in dealing with a conflict is to gain an understanding of the others needs.

Be careful with threats
Threats may only be used when the threat giver fully intends to act immediately on the threat, should the conditions for fulfilling the threat be met.

Confidentiality
It is inappropriate to use information from confidential sources or to indicate that such information exists.
Accusations
Fair conflict always allows a person who is charged with inappropriate behaviour:
  - to know who his or her accusers are
  - to learn in detail what his or her accusers concerns are
  - to respond to those who accuse

Solving problems
Fair conflict seeks to deal with the problem by:
  - Working together to find a solution that is fair and just for both
  - Looking for creative solutions that meets needs

Resolution and reconciliation
Not all issues can be resolved and not all relationships can be reconciled. Our call as Christians is to become aware of our involvement in conflict, to know God's forgiveness and to move as far toward reconciliation with others as God's grace and justice will allow us to go.
Steps toward Relational Reconciliation

If you have been involved in a church or organisational process of consultation or facilitation you may have identified tense or broken relationships which are preventing you from contributing fully and effectively to managing or resolving the issues.

You may be a hurt or injured person in this context. You may also be aware that you have said or done things which have injured or hurt others. It is likely you will be both.

You will also have heard that it is necessary to reconcile relationships before work on the differences and issues can begin. It is important that issues are separated from relationships and the two are dealt with independently because if relationships are not reconciled any work on the issues gets reinfected by the anger, resentment and anxiety of unresolved relationships.

The opportunity to meet one to one with people in this situation who have hurt you or whom you have hurt is only one small part of the process but it is an important beginning. A couple of points:

- These meetings are simply about putting the relationship itself right not about discussing or attempting to resolve the substantive issues or disagreements.
- The questions here are: What has been said or done which has injured another? Am I willing to hear how I have hurt another? Am I willing to honestly share my hurt? Am I willing to offer an apology? Am I willing to request and receive forgiveness for my actions? Am I willing to forgive the person who asks me for forgiveness?
- Reconciliation is not the same as restoration. Reconciliation puts the relationship right. It does not immediately restore it to what it was before. Restoration takes time as it is a rebuilding of trust. It does not always happen. Relational reconciliation (or putting the relationship right) should however be a priority.

If you are an offending party (most of us are in times of conflict)

The first step is to listen and to reflect. If you are aware or become aware through listening of how you have hurt another person, it may be helpful to consider what elements to include in an apology to make it most effective and constructive. Many people actually appreciate a written apology. This implies time and effort put into this step toward reconciliation and can be given to the other person in a session together.

It is important however, before apologising, to ensure you have taken the time to understand the situation, to reflect on your behaviour and on its consequences. This is important if the confession and repentance is to be genuine. If you do not fully understand the impact on the other person, take the time to listen and then to reflect before offering an apology. While there may be a complex set of factors which contributed to your behaviour, you need to accept responsibility for it and be clear about this in your communication. Avoid “if”, “but” and “however”. For this reason it may be valuable to write down what you want to say and even get some godly assistance in important situations to ensure you are honest and clear.

An appropriate apology includes confession, repentance and the request for forgiveness. It looks something like this:
1. Begin with an acknowledgement that you have done wrong, not just generally, but specifically against this person. Let the party you've offended know that you acknowledge your wrongdoing against them and accept full responsibility for your behaviour. There are three parts to this acknowledgement. 1. It can help to be **specific** about the behaviour involved indicating you are aware of exactly what was done. 2. It is helpful also to be clear that this is **wrong** and that you are aware that the behaviour is unacceptable. In other words you pass judgement yourself on your behaviour. 3. Finally it is important to acknowledge that the behaviour offended a specific **person**. It is against this person that you have done wrong.

2. Acknowledge the **personal hurt and harm** your offence has caused. It is important to acknowledge that your behaviour has had consequences for the person and for your relationship. You are owning up not only to the offence but also to the harmful consequences your behaviour brought about.

3. Express **regret** (remorse) for the action and its consequences. Sharing a reflection of genuine regret is important. This is where saying the words “I am sorry for” is important.

4. Demonstrate repentance by identifying an **alternative biblical behaviour**. Show that you have truly considered your behaviour by sharing what you should have done instead. Show what the appropriate alternative behaviour would have been and commit to acting this way in the future. This is an indication of time taken to consider the situation, its causes and the changes which will need to take place in you. Sharing this is a commitment to repentance.

5. Conclude by a **request for forgiveness**. Acknowledge that if the offence has been deeply damaging this may take time and may not be easy for the other person to act on. In making a genuine apology however you have taken the first step in reconciliation.

E.g. “Peter, I need to apologise for my angry and ungracious words to you on Saturday evening a couple of weeks ago, I was upset, angry and worried, and I let these things get the better of me, and ended up hurting you through my careless and insulting words. This was wrong of me and I feel embarrassed and ashamed of my behaviour to you. I know I hurt you deeply and caused a break in our relationship. I am sorry for what I said. I recognise now I should have collected myself, calmed down and thought about things before speaking. I think I would have handled the situation differently if I had been patient and a little more gentle. I am prepared to make a commitment to work on this area of my life. I apologise unreservedly to you and I ask you to extend forgiveness to me for what I have done”
If you have been hurt and are feeling injured (most of us also fit into this category) First a little self reflection is in order here. Remember to watch for the log in your own eye before alerting a brother or sister to the splinter which pricked you. If you have considered this and can honestly say before God that this is not a situation which cannot be overlooked and needs to be addressed for the sake of the relationship, then finding some way to share this with the other person is appropriate. Biblically the appropriate pathway is to go them first alone and take another if this fails to get anywhere. Think carefully about how you express your injury. “I” statements are always better than “you” statements.

Mary, I wonder if we can talk privately for a few minutes. I need to share with you how I am feeling. ....... On Saturday night after our conversation, I felt humiliated and deeply hurt. What I heard from you really stunned me and left me feeling like I wanted to give up this ministry. I know we do things differently, however I feel like my contribution is not up to your expectations and not valued. I need to let you know just how painful for me our conversation was. Could we talk about how to get our relationship back on track as I feel we need this put right between us.

Relational reconciliation is only the first step in conflict resolution. It is however necessary and essential. We cannot get to work on major issues if relationships are not put right.

If this initial step fails, the next is to move toward mediation or a facilitated conversation.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32
Guidelines for personal involvement in reconciliation

Reconciliation is a Biblical instruction based on four principles:

1. **Truth-telling**
   There will be opportunity given for all parties to communicate honestly and openly. Encouragement is given to speak in the first person. I.e. “I” statements rather than “You” statements. Individuals will be given the opportunity to speak without interruption.
   Parties are encouraged to:
   1. share their interests, needs and values and what the problem or issue is for them
   2. share how they feel

2. **Justice-seeking**
   There will be opportunity given for each party to share if there is felt injury, injustice or a felt need requiring acknowledgement and potentially some process 'to make things right'. Parties are encouraged to:
   1. share what they would like to see done to make the situation right, to resolve or restore the situation
   2. share what they are prepared to do or offer to meet others needs and 'make it right'

3. **Grace-giving**
   The exercise of grace allows parties to make room to understand each other's needs, interests and values. This often involves acknowledging there has been hurt on both sides. The giving and receiving of forgiveness is important for there to be reconciliation.
   Parties are encouraged under the grace and forgiveness of God to:
   1. acknowledge an offence if the other feels this; whether it was committed intentionally or not.
   2. to offer an apology and request forgiveness
   3. to receive an apology and grant forgiveness when asked

4. **Peace-making**
   Making peace is hard work. It means the establishment of a new way of relating or working together than allows the acknowledged needs, interests and values of the other be met. This may involve compromise where two outcomes are incompatible or a creative solution where both sets of needs can be met. Parties are encouraged:
   1. to look for new ways forward where everyone can have their needs, interests and values respected
   2. to work on the issue and not to attack the person
   3. to be future focused
   4. to be willing to give as well as receive
   5. to document the agreement as a covenant made between the parties

In order to facilitate a healthy, constructive and godly exchange, parties are asked to covenant with the mediator/facilitator that they will speak respectfully and with care. The mediator/facilitator reserves the right to close the meeting and request that parties leave without further discussion with each other if the emotional level of the meeting creates the possibility that individuals will be hurt or injured by a careless exchange.
Managing disagreements through mediation

An introduction to the mediation process for participants

Thank you for your willingness to participate in mediation. This page is a general introduction to the process we will follow when we meet to discuss the issues before us.

Mediation is a facilitated discussion which allows both parties to share their points of view, their needs, values and interests. It seeks to provide a safe environment where honesty can be encouraged and feelings expressed within an appropriate framework. The discussion in mediation is intentionally structured to enable effective and clear communication and understanding. The process is outlined below with ideas on how you might prepare to contribute to a positive outcome. Please take some time to prepare well.

An opportunity is given for each person to share their story, experiences, values, needs and preferred outcomes;
It is worth taking a little time to reflect prayerfully about how to share your story. It is important to be honest and share all that may be important to the discussion. It helps to share your story in the form of what you need, what you would like, what the issues are that you see, what concerns you have and what you feel could be done about this. If you start with a non-negotiable position it makes mediation hard work for all parties. Give some careful thought to how the other party is likely to see things, to the needs, interests and values they have as well as your own. Think carefully about what you could offer that would assist or help them.

An opportunity to apologise, and to offer and receive forgiveness for personal hurts that may have occurred in the relationship;
This small segment is very important in that it recognises that before issues can be discussed and resolved, relationships must be reconciled. If possible this should happen before we get to this point. Ongoing resentment and lack of forgiveness will almost always re-infect the process if not dealt with. If you have been hurt or aware that you may have injured the other person by words or actions, this is the time to put this right through an apology and a request for forgiveness.

Identification of the core issues in the disagreement;
In many cases clear communication goes a long way towards resolving a disagreement. It helps if you can give some thought to what you see the one, two or three core issues as being.

An open exchange of information each side needs to know;
In order to come to some way forward on these issues, is there information that you need to share or gain from the other party to enable both parties to think wisely and well about the issue.

Generation of pathways forward or options for resolving or managing the disagreement;
We do not want to reach solutions too quickly in mediation as it is important to let the pathways, solutions or options for a way forward arise from a common understanding of each person’s needs, interests and values. However if you sense there are creative options for meeting everyone’s needs, please reflect on these and bring them forward at the right time. We will be prayerfully evaluating each of these and looking for joint ways to move forward constructively. Some conflicts by their nature cannot be solved and instead agreement on how to manage them might be the best option.

A joint decision to reach agreement;
Mediation normally involves reaching some sort of negotiated agreement about what will happen from here, who will be responsible, and how the future relationship will be managed. It needs to be remembered that mediation is a process based on goodwill and trust. It is voluntary, not legally binding. In the end the trustworthiness of each party is essential to its success.

Documenting the agreement.
The outcome of mediation is documented and both parties sign the covenant committing themselves to abide by the agreement. This document is confidential to the parties unless agreed otherwise.

Jesus’ words in Matt 18:20 “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them” are specifically spoken in the context of conflict resolution. Let us seek to be committed to listen with grace and humility to one another, to think the best of each other, and to work for the best outcome for all.
Managing disagreements through mediation

An introduction to the mediation process for facilitators

1. Setting up the mediation session (several days before)
   a) Can be done via phone, email or personal discussion
   b) Introduce the process of mediation, summarise basic mediation principles: voluntary, confidential, private sessions may be used, session will be terminated if emotional level gets high, a support person can come but remains silent in the session.
   c) Explain mediators' roles and the rules of mediation which will be observed.
   d) Remind participants about the aim of the session to explore interests, needs and values around an issue and seek a pathway forward. Indicate that preparation is important. Give out preparation sheets

2. Mediator's preparation
   a) Prepare room: private space, round table if possible, whiteboard, water, enough chairs for all
   b) Prepare personally: through prayer and by going familiarising again through the process
   c) Prepare as a team: know which elements of the process will be facilitated by which mediator

3. Pre-mediation briefing
   a) Meet again directly before mediation (10 mins) to go over process, rules, and to remind participants to focus on their interests, needs and values and what they might have to offer toward a solution.
   b) Pray with each party individually.
   c) Assure participants that your role is to provide for a way forward and to protect them from further injury

4. Welcome
   a) Welcome each person and introduce any support people who might not be known to the other party.
   b) Commend the participants for willingness to enter mediation.
   c) Pray with the group. Briefly remind both of rules: No interruptions, need for respect and care with language, mediator can stop at any point, if emotional level gets high and likelihood of people being hurt is increased, mediator will close the session.

5. Storytelling
   a) Mediator 1 invites a party to begin. Usually person with the grievance or who has requested begins but either can start. Participants address story to mediator in presence of the other party.
   b) Story shared for around 20mins
   c) Opportunity given for questions for clarity to be asked by mediator or other party at the end of the story but no challenges to information can made at this point
   d) Mediator 2 summarises main points in 2-3 minutes and checks that this is correct and an adequate summary.
   e) Process is repeated for second participant

6. Interpersonal reconciliation
   a) Opportunity given to apologise and request forgiveness if hurt and injury has been identified by one or both of the parties.
   b) Opportunity to bring an injury forward if this was not mentioned in the story above.
   c) Facilitate the exchange of apologies.
7. Identifying key issues
   a) Mediator 1 identifies the key issues and sets an agenda for discussion (only list 2-4)
   b) Documented on a whiteboard – this objectifies the issues and externalises them from people. Participants can work on issues – not attack persons.
   c) Seek agreement to work through the list item by item

8. Dealing with issues
   a) Encourage parties at this point to begin to speak directly to each other and focus on the issues.
   b) Seek exploration of the interests, needs and values of each party around each issue. What can parties agree on. Can parties see the other's point of view and recognise validity in it.
   c) What can be done to bring resolution. What can be offered by each party to find a way forward.
   d) Place each option on the table and ask for ways each option connects to the needs and interests of each party. Encourage an objective approach to discussion.

9. Private Session
   a) This may be requested by either party or by the mediators if the discussion stalls around a point or issue.
   b) The purpose of a private session is to free up blockages or identify issues that are holding up progress toward agreement. Mediators meet one on one with each party and encourage them to reconnect to the needs and interests of the other and reconsider what might be offered. There may not be another opportunity.
   c) While mediators need to encourage reconsideration, they need to be cautious about offering too much advice or suggesting solutions.

10. Negotiating agreement
    a) Mediator 2 notes down areas of agreement about issues, decisions, what will be done, by whom and when as the discussion progresses.
    b) At the end Mediator 2 clarifies the outcomes and confirms the agreements verbally.
    c) Mediator 1 checks the 'liveability' of what has been agreed.
    d) Mediator 2 then confirms timing of writing the report and seeks a willingness from each participant that they will sign it after reading.

11. Follow-up
    a) Write report and distribute to parties for agreement
    b) Be cautious about accepting major changes at this point as this can reverse the whole process – but do accept minor corrections to factual details.
    c) Ask for a returned signed copy once the final report is agreed.

12. Evaluate the process
    a) Two mediators should debrief session together and reflect on what was learnt through the process
    b) Note any follow up needed to the situation on behalf of mediators
Managing disagreements through mediation
Agreed ground rules

1. The purpose of mediation is to provide a structured opportunity for conflict resolution within a safe communicative environment. These rules provide boundaries within which a safe conversation can be undertaken. The session will not proceed unless the following are confirmed as agreed by each party.

2. The mediators will facilitate the session and parties agree to abide by their instructions in order for all participants to feel safe and able to communicate openly.

3. While parties are encouraged to share their feelings, the mediators will close the session if the emotional level increases to the point that a careless verbal exchange is likely to cause significant hurt to one of the parties. In this case, both parties agree to leave separately and without further exchange with each other.

4. The mediators may indicate the inappropriate nature of a comment and ask for it to be withdrawn. This is possible where there is:
   a) a threatening or intimidatory comment
   b) caricaturing, labelling or ‘name-calling’ of either behaviour or individuals
   c) a verbalised assumption about negative motives or intent of the other party including inappropriate blaming

5. The mediators may call for a private session to break an impasse or to point out the inappropriate nature of a comment or the non-verbal communication that accompanies comments or suggestions made. Participants agree to participate in private sessions when called by mediators.
Facilitating Parish Conflict as a Leader

**Build an atmosphere of trust**
Trust is the single most important element in healthy conflict management. Building an open, respectful and safe system is the foundation for constructive rather than destructive conflict.

**Establish conflict as normal**
Expect it. Don't let it catch you off guard. It's as much a part of life as food. Be open about its presence. Name it. Explore it. Invite it. Welcome and explore differences. Be wary of a decision that seems to be "flying through" without dissent. Create ongoing structures that invite dialogue, feedback and evaluation. Exploit it. Conflict is the stuff of growth and change and progress. Learn from it and help others learn from it. Use it to learn new truths about yourself, each other and God.

**Equip yourself with skills, especially listening**
Careful, deep listening is a tangible sign of respect and is a critical element in conflict transformation. It includes temporarily setting side your own agenda in order to understand what the other person is trying to communicate.

**Be a non-anxious presence and stay connected**
Conflict often produces fear and anxiety. Your ability as a leader to move toward the point of anxiety and be a calm, non-judgmental and sensitive presence is critical. It means staying engaged with people, their emotions and their issues rather than retreating or attacking.

**Invite and model self-definition**
Model the capacity to openly state your feelings, goals, values, preferences and roles. This clarity opens the way for others to define themselves as well rather than waiting to simply react to others.

**Good process prevents unnecessary conflict**
"Go slow to go fast" Carefully planning problem-solving and decision-making processes and being clear about the steps involved saves much time and frustration in the long run. The process is not only as important as the outcome but actually helps determine the outcome.

**Keep your eye on the system**
Your congregation/organization is a system with rules and patterns and habits. Every interaction and every conflict is affected by the system and visa versa. Ask yourself what meaning specific things have for the larger system.

**Keep conflict manageable**
Be proactive. Listen constantly and deal with issues as soon as they emerge. Sorting through differences of opinion early is much easier than dealing with antagonism and escalated conflict later.

**Feelings are an important part of the process**
Invite, acknowledge and validate the presence and expression of emotions. Explore their meaning. They are key to resolution.

**Keep the process mutual**
Invite feedback, suggestions and criticism from others. Receive it non-defensively, listen carefully and accurately paraphrase the concerns before responding. Work to remove problems from a competitive framework. Frame it as a problem to be solved together. Validate the other and the relationship and your commitment to both.

**Know when to ask for help**
Know when you need to ask for help and where you can find that help. Seeking outside help is a strength not a weakness.

**You can only change yourself**
Resist the temptation to focus on changing others. Edwin Friedman (Generation to Generation), says that the success of a leader is more related to how he or she functions as an individual than on managing the members. In his words, "the key to successful coaches is less a matter of how they 'handle' the players than how they handle themselves."

adapted from Carolyn Schrock-Shenk
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Overview of the Church Conflict Process

**Church Conflict Process**

**Create Space through Negotiating Process and Reconciling Relationships**
- Ground Rules
- Covenant Commitments
- IP Reconciliation
- Teaching Conflict

**Facilitate Exploration and Understanding**
- Critical Issues Analysis
- Storytelling
- ‘Cards on the table’
- Private coaching sessions
- Facilitated group work
- Polarity Exploration

**Generate and Evaluate Multiple Options**
- Brainstorming options
- Round Robin Work
- Delta Workshop
- Traffic Lights
- Mapping Exercises

**Discern and Decide**
- Reflective and Spiritual discernment processes
- Constitution / Rules
- Consultation Report with Recommendations
- Implementation Plan

**Conflict Tools**
- Complexity
Systemic Factors in Communal Conflict

Assessing the conflict
- extent (20% rule)
- map the conflict / assess the level
- type (problem to solve, polarity to manage)

Reducing anxiety through communicating process
- the pastor as a non-anxious presence
- ground rules for fighting fair
- covenant commitments in times of conflict

Accessing objective assistance
- personal support (for the person, not the position)
- mediation, consultancy, arbitration

Know what you assistance you need
- conflict prevention
- conflict management
- conflict resolution
Understanding Church Systems

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rules</strong></td>
<td>Constitution, bylaws, standard operating procedures, written policies</td>
<td>Spoken conscious guidelines not necessarily legislated. &quot;Crying babies</td>
<td>Largely unspoken norms for &quot;expected&quot; behaviours such as dress codes,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>go to the nursery,&quot;</td>
<td>handling strangers, conflict, clergy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Roles</strong></td>
<td>Formally defined roles for pastor, elders, staff, and ministry leaders,</td>
<td>Informal roles include those such as un-elected leaders and influencers,</td>
<td>Various &quot;gatekeeper&quot; functions: who determines and sanctions what is</td>
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<td></td>
<td>job descriptions, position charters.</td>
<td>patriarchs, matriarchs, Devil's advocate, Mr Fix-it etc.</td>
<td>allowed and disallowed, who will be empowered and blamed, faithful</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>few who do all the work, often dysfunctional</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rituals</strong></td>
<td>Worship, music liturgical style and forms, induction rites, ceremonies</td>
<td>Meeting rituals before and or after services or meetings, when you</td>
<td>Greeting rituals, shaking hands, rituals of acceptance or rejection,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of inclusion</td>
<td>stand, kneel or sit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>Vision and mission statements Documents of change; new directions and</td>
<td>&quot;We need some more members around here so we can keep the old system!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Let's grow old together&quot;, &quot;Let's keep the church well-maintained&quot;,</td>
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<td>policies, implementation of changes</td>
<td>&quot;Let's do something about our giving!&quot;</td>
<td>etc. Can easily be heading in the opposite direction.</td>
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Five levels of congregational conflict

Level 1: We’ve got a problem, let’s solve it

Objective: Solve a real problem with conventional methods of discussion based on trust.

Identifying Dynamics:
Clear and specific language
Participants are able to stay focused
Significant trust and risk-taking exists
Parties believe that rational discussion and good communication can fix the problem

Strategies:
Use collaborative problem solving
  Problem definition
  Fact gathering
  Exploring values and needs
  Searching for alternatives
  Consensus decision-making
Work at the grass-roots level
Encourage participation
Increase the power and visibility of minority groups or powerless individuals

Level 2: OK, Let’s fix the problem but I need to come out looking good....

Complex objective: Both fixing the problem but protecting self in the process

Identifying Dynamics:
Higher emotional content to the language
Language moves to generalisations
Not all facts and aspects of the problems are shared openly - ‘play the cards’
Triangling occurs
Participants will admit trust is down
Sniping can exist - jokes have a hostile edge
Inaccuracies in the other’s case are pointed out mainly to score points
People start looking for help to deal with the situation

Strategies:
Use Level 1 strategies
Focus on unity, teamwork and communication skills - use training
Encourage the expression of feelings
Build trust
Level 3: The Contest - There is only one way to resolve this, this is it and you will have to accept it.

Objective: To ensure my position is maintained or my view prevails. To win.

Identifying Dynamics:
- Contest language (My way rather than ‘best’)
- Emotional language (“People are upset”)
- Language reflects perceptual distortion (fear), either/or, always, never, nobody, everyone.
- Power is used, personal and emotional attacks attempt to influence people’s thinking
- Informal clumps or coalitions begin to emerge
- Parties do not easily talk informally
- We are right, the others better see it and come and make peace - (dispute about initiation process)
- Assumptions about the others’ motives and intentions are made (mind reading)

Strategies:
- Keep collaborative strategies in mind
- Develop clear ground rules for conflict
- Structure the problem solving process with all
- Work at increasing trust through sharing:
  - Feelings
  - How they contribute to the problem
  - Common goals, history, interests, values
  - Use liturgical worship, thanksgiving, prayer
  - Clarify differences between assumptions and reality (images, caricatures)
- Work to keep the focus on the problem and off the people.
- Use private sessions if required
- Search for super-ordinate goals
Level 4: Fight/Flight - The only way through this is for one of us to leave..... The Rector will have to go!

Objective: Break the need for working the problem through and the relationship by leaving or getting the other to leave.

Identifying Dynamics:
Clear development of factions with leadership and tight boundaries
The unity of the factional group is more important than the unity of the whole - conflict in the faction is suppressed to give solidarity
Parties will push their own agenda at the expense of the whole
The other party is assumed to be hypocritical and stereotypes are used
Parties attempt to recruit outsiders for validity
The conflict shifts from the issues to individuals and principles
Use of rejection rituals - dancing the fight
Attempts at expulsion
Emotional attacks on people

Strategies:
Use organisationally authorised processes: arbitration, votes, processes
Identify the risks of conflict at this level
An independent third party can work with each party individually, search for common ground, interdependence, super-ordinate goals - private feedback.
Third party works with groups to help them relocate the issues, values and needs in the problem - private feedback
Keep the authority of the leadership / majority clearly in focus
Work at the higher levels of organisation not the grass-roots
After a win/lose decision allow people to leave with dignity
Level 5: Intractable - Look at what this person has done to us, someone has to stop him/her from hurting others.

Objective: Destroy/damage the person - Revenge

Identifying Dynamics:
Parties perceive themselves on the side of some righteous cause
Means are justified by ends
People are not prepared to withdraw but to fight and defeat others
This is seen as the only option
Parties present themselves as true heroes
Factions become ideological groups

Strategies:
The relevant authorities must act to keep parties from destructive behaviour
Separation can help but some form of peace-keeping force needs to be in place.
Parties must be dis-empowered or expelled if their destructive behaviour continues

Level 0: There is nothing wrong.

Objective: Keep all conflict suppressed. Conflict exists but is neither acknowledged or addressed.

Usually a depressive response to a major event

Watch for the 0 <-> 4 pattern
Polarities to Manage vs Problems to Solve

Some church issues may be problems that can be solved. Others may revolve around ongoing polarities that need to be managed. It is helpful to distinguish between a problem and a polarity because if one treats a polarity like a problem, unnecessary time and effort will be spent trying to reach a settled agreement on something that by definition will keep shifting under your feet.

A polarity can be two values, principles, or practices that are seemingly opposite to each other, yet are interdependent. Examples include: worship - traditional/contemporary; leadership - visionary/participatory; outreach: seeker sensitive/distinctive healthy church culture

To determine whether you have a polarity to manage or a problem to solve, two questions are helpful:
• Is the difficulty or tension ongoing?
• Are there two poles that appear interdependent?

“Problems to solve” have a solution which can be considered an end point in a process, i.e. they are solvable. “Polarities to manage,” on the other hand, do not get “solved.” They are ongoing.

“The solution in problems to solve can stand alone... The solution does not have the necessary opposite that is required for the solution to work over an extended period of time. “Polarities to manage... require a shift in emphasis between opposites such that neither can stand alone. It is a “both/and” difficulty. Both one pole and its apparent opposite depend on each other. The pair are involved in an ongoing, balancing process over an extended period of time. They are interdependent. They need each other” (E.g. Johnson’ breathing metaphor)

- working with both sides to identify the poles,
- understanding and articulating the positive and negative aspects of each pole,
- recognising how people experience the polarities (blindsides and critical focus)
- maximising the upside and minimising the downside (working the loop)
- coaching leaders in language that accommodates rather than exacerbates tension.
Minister - Congregation Relations Group

Being the minister of a parish is one of the most challenging of all leadership positions. It is different in many respects to forms of leadership which operate in contemporary corporate and organisational environments. The church too is different from other collectives of people and is perhaps more prone to conflict than other comparative groups. For these reasons some churches have adopted a Minister – Congregation Relations Group to pro-actively deal with communication, conflict and change issues which will always come up within this important relationship.

1. The group should be made up of 3-5 members who are jointly appointed by the Parish Council and the minister. Group members need to have the confidence of both church leadership and the minister. Appointment should be for a term of three years.
2. The group should be trained and supported in conflict resolution, communication and change management skills.
3. The group is the first port-of-call for people who have a concern about the minister's leadership, about change, sermons, non-personal issues to do with the pastor's ministry, performance and leadership. This is to protect the minister from dealing with all the normal issues of concern and conflict which can distract a leader from moving forward in a constructive way.
4. The group is formally authorised and empowered to deal with concerns themselves where possible and to judge which concerns should be re-directed to the minister.
5. The group needs to monitor its own relationship with the pastor and to meet regularly with the minister, not to go over all the issues but for both to share in the processes of leadership, vision, change and communication. The meetings with the pastor should be proactive rather than reactive.
6. If the group begins to pick up serious issues, high level conflict, division in the church and large numbers of people dissatisfied this information needs to be appropriately communicated as soon as possible to the minister, Parish Council and pastoral review group.
7. In times of ongoing high level conflict and especially if trust has eroded this group may need to be disbanded or placed in recess and a consultancy team or denominational facilitator called in to avoid triangulation. In conflict the group should not meet without the minister.

An effective Minister – Congregation Relations Group can save a lot of stress for a pastor and also provide a valuable service to the church as it represents a clear pathway for concerns to be expressed. The very existence of the group sometimes acts as a factor to lower anxiety.
Equipping a congregation to deal with conflict:

Outline of a training program

1 Christian perspectives on conflict
   Conflict is not wrong in itself - it does keep poor company
   Helpful and unhelpful ways of dealing with conflict (personal styles)
   Common causes of conflict in churches (Problems and polarities)

2 Covenant commitments in times of conflict
   Biblical foundations for conflict resolution
   Rules for a godly engagement

3 Practice makes perfect
   Using case studies
   Carefully using real life situations to practice

4 Establishing a parish conflict policy
   Interpersonal conflicts
   Conflicts in leadership
   Conflict with clergy
Christian churches are dynamic communities with strongly held values and beliefs which are not just ideas but of deep and eternal significance to those who hold them. Churches are concerned with the transformation of individuals' lives, with creating community and engaging the society around them. They are made up of adherents who come from very different walks of life, with different personalities and who would not necessarily be together if it was not for the sake of God's kingdom. They operate within a framework of personal, corporate and cosmic good and evil, again which may be understood differently by members. All this is particularly fertile ground for conflict.

While churches are realistically conflict prone, they do not usually understand this and often dismiss, deny or suppress creative disagreement in the name of love and unity. Consequently the community in our world which should be the most skilled and capable at dealing well with conflict is often paralysed, disabled and sometimes destroyed by it.

Conflict is normal
Churches need to re-discover from the New Testament that conflict is normal. It can be creative and healthy. It is an expected aspect of change, transformation and growth. If we are not working through disagreements, differences and perspectives that challenge each other, are we really alive and growing?
Conflict is frightening because it is not often handled wisely and well. People get hurt and clearly ungodly behaviour is often tolerated without accountability. This has resulted in many Christians carrying hurts from previous church conflicts increasing their anxiety. Churches often lack wise and appropriate processes for dealing even with basic complaints and conflicts.

Teaching
All churches should regularly teach about conflict and how it can be handled within Christian families, relationships and churches. Dealing with emotions like anger, resentment and fear should be discussed regularly. Spiritual practices like restoration, forgiveness, truth-telling, justice-seeking and grace-giving should be well understood and practically applied.

Training
The teaching above becomes significantly more important in leadership. All ministry team leaders, pastoral care team members, youth leaders and home group leaders need to be well equipped with an understanding of conflict and with resolution processes. Training should include: understanding conflict styles, the biblical principles of conflict resolution, commitments at times of conflict and the principles and policies of the church. If the church does not have the ability for this training within, it is well worth inviting a trainer to come and set it up in a way it can become part of the operating culture of the church.

Policies and procedures
All lay governance boards, elderships, parish councils, leadership and ministry teams need to establish some clear policies and procedures which will guide individuals, teams and the church in times of tension. Ideally these should be discussed, agreed collectively and adopted before conflict:
- A teamwork covenant for leadership teams including the governing board
- A grievance policy (based on Matt 18)
- Covenant Commitments for Christians at Times of Tension
- A Pastor – Congregation relations group

Peacemaking Team / Mediators
For larger churches, an excellent add-on for the pastoral care ministry is to equip a team of mature skilled individuals in peace-making skills from a Biblical perspective. This can include mediation skills, facilitation skills, negotiation and even arbitration. This group can be used in family, small group and even leadership conflicts. For whole church conflicts, external facilitation is usually required for objectivity.

Practice
Once healthy policies, practices and attitudes to conflict are in place, take every opportunity that comes to practice. Do not be afraid to name disagreements and to use them as means to apply conflict resolution skills and gain insight into how processes work.

Respond quickly
If conflict does unfold, respond to it quickly and firmly. Most situations that eventually become ugly in churches have often been ignored for some time and people have been unnecessarily hurt through lack of process. It is best to be well prepared, but do not be cautious in seeking advice from mentors, denominational leaders and others who may be able to offer assistance.

Tim Dyer  John Mark Ministries 2010
Sample Grievance Procedure

From time to time, in every community, issues arise between individuals and organisations. This is normal. In anticipation, this document is designed to assist individuals find a godly and appropriate pathway to see their issues and concerns addressed.

The core Biblical values that support this process are truth-telling (Eph 4:15,25), justice-seeking (Micah 6:8), grace-giving (Col 3:13) and peace-making (Matt 5:9, Eph 4:2-3). The overall process is outlined in Matt 18:15-20.

Once begun this process should be followed with care, a concern to deal with the situation quickly so that it does not become complex and a commitment to the values above.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step One</th>
<th><strong>Personal Reflection</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take some time before God to pray and reflect on the offence or injury you have received. In some situations it is appropriate to overlook the offence, in other situations important principles may be at stake and the situation needs to be taken further.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step One (Optional)</th>
<th><strong>Wisdom and Accountability</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you are unsure about the right response and feel the need to seek wise counsel for yourself before taking the situation further it is appropriate to do so. Seek a godly counsellor, pastor, leader or mentor to share with. The focus of this is to gain clarity on the right path to take and to be accountable in the situation to act with integrity, wisdom and towards making peace.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>This consultation must be distinguished from gossip or sharing the incident with others in order to gain sympathy and support. These are inappropriate.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Step Two</th>
<th><strong>Informal Discussion</strong></th>
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<td>A key step in resolution is to go to the other person informally and in private and share your concern. Seek to understand the perspective and viewpoint of the other. Be willing to receive an apology or respond to a process of restoration if it is offered. If the matter is resolved, no further action is needed.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Step Three</th>
<th><strong>Formal Discussions</strong></th>
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<td></td>
<td>If step two fails to reach a resolution ask that it move to a formal process. Here others may be invited to be involved as either support people or informal facilitators. At this level it is appropriate that some record be kept of what occurs. If resolved, no further action is required. Normally the church leadership would be notified that this has happened.</td>
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### Step Four

**Formal Mediation**

If step three fails, then the church should appoint a trained and agreed mediator who will meet with both parties and then facilitate a discussion together. Points of agreement and disagreement are usually documented along with the outcome, usually a solution which is acceptable to both. If agreement is reached, no further action. The confidential report is given to the church leadership as well as to the individuals. Keeping the agreement is a matter of trust on both sides.

### Step Five

**Arbitration**

If step four fails, the church and both parties may agree to abide by the ruling of an appointed and agreed arbiter or arbitration panel. In this scenario the arbiter interviews both parties and may ask for further witnesses. The case is examined and principles of justice applied. A judgement will be given and the parties by their own agreement should abide by it.

If this step fails, the situation has moved beyond the ability of the community to handle it internally and it must be referred to the civil courts.
Biblical Reflections
Matthew 18:15-20

15 "If a brother or sister sins, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

18 "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."
Acts 6:1-7

1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews [a] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented them to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.
Acts 15

1 Certain individuals came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. 5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

16 "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, 17 that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things" 18 things known from long ago.

19 "It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. 21 For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, who were leaders among the believers. 23 With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:
Greetings.

24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorisation and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

30 So they were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31 The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. 32 Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.