Conflict Resolution to Preserve Church Unity

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DEDICATION

To Curtis—my rock and partner in adventure.

To Camille and Charles—my joy and delight.

To Gena, Ernie, Ruth, Terrel, Curt, and Vicki—my encouragement and support.

To my Church Family—my inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

God has called the church into unity that reflects the unity of the Triune God in the midst of a culture that is polarized and entertained by drama caused by conflict. Local churches are comprised of relationships, and conflict is a byproduct of relationship. Conflict can lead to divisiveness that causes disunity in the congregation, or it can be a spark that leads to relational growth that encourages unity. Pastors and ministry leaders can learn skills and conflict management strategies from businesses, marriage experts, and the life and ministry of Jesus and Paul. Workplace conflict teaches church leaders how crucial it is to take time, evaluate outcomes and goals, strategize a plan, and equip people for inevitable conflict. Marriage conflict research reveals it is of the utmost importance to prioritize the relationship of the people involved, to resolve the conflict in ways that uphold the relationship, and to discover the art of the pause when tension and frustration become evident. Throughout Jesus' ministry, he taught the importance of forgiveness, spoke truth with grace, and turned conflict into opportunities to teach. Paul gives instructions to the church on how to preserve and protect the unity of the church. Ultimately, how people resolve conflict is a choice. Corporate spiritual disciplines, table time, and play all form community and can help people choose to resolve conflict in constructive ways to preserve the unity of the church.

CHAPTER 1:

UNITY DISRUPTED BY CONFLICT

"We believe also in only One, Universal, Apostolic, and [Holy] Church…"
Nicene Creed

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the
body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we
were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all
made to drink of one Spirit."
I Corinthians 12:12-13

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your
calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above
all and through all and in all."
Ephesians 4:4-6

The call of the church is not to sameness but to oneness. God does not desire

cookie-cutter followers, but God does desire for unity amongst God's children. The unity

of the church is to reflect the relational unity of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son,

and God the Holy Spirit.[1] They are together as one but retain their own distinctiveness.

The foundation of church unity is in God, yet many churches are plagued by disunity and

divisiveness. Church board meetings end in a stalemate, church hopping has become the

norm, and deep relationships are not being cultivated. Conflict can easily keep the church

from unity, especially when it is not handled in ways that are life-enhancing for the

church body.

Conflict is part of the human experience and therefore encompasses all aspects of

life—personal, social, professional, and church. People may try to prevent it, but conflict

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[1] Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity In A Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 239, Kindle.

is inevitable and unavoidable.[2] Although conflict is a common human experience, most

people do not know how to handle conflict in healthy ways. People do not use it as a

springboard to growth, but rather a plank that leads to despair. However, conflict can be

beneficial: both for individuals and for local churches. It has the potential to bring growth

and depth to relationships within congregations.

A Culture Consumed in Conflict

To better understand conflict within the church, it is important to understand

conflict within the American culture; a culture that is entertained, even captivated, by

conflict. American news thrives on polarization and a "me verses you" mentality. CNN

has a group of devoted followers while FOX News has theirs, on different ends of the

spectrum, who argue, ridicule, and insult each other. Movies, sitcoms, and dramas are

centered on the theme of conflict. In May 2019, 18 million viewers watched the series

finale of "The Big Bang Theory," a show about seven friends that often find themselves

in relational conflict.[3] Reality TV thrives on high levels of conflict. Season 23 of "The

Bachelor" aired in 2019 and averaged 6.5 million viewers throughout the season. CBS's

highest-rated, primetime show is "Big Brother" with 4.19 million viewers in October

2020.[4] These viewers tuned in to watch the intrapersonal conflict and the interpersonal

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[2] David W. Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 20.

[3] Cynthia Littleton and Will Thorne, "'The Big Bang Theory' Finale Scores Huge Ratings, 18 Million Viewers," Variety, May 17, 2019, https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/the-big-bang-theory-finale-early-ratings-1203218476/.

[4] Patrick Hipes, "'Big Brother' Tops Thursday Ratings for BBS; ABC's Game Show Block No. 1 In Viewers," Deadline, October 2, 2020, https://deadline.com/2020/10/big-brother-tv-ratings-lets-be-real-thursday-1234590268/.

conflict between all of the participants on the show. Professional athletes create conflict

when they mock, fight, ridicule, and tear apart their opponents. In the 2013 National

Football Conference Championship, Richard Sherman, defensive player for the Seattle

Seahawks, blocked a ball from receiver Michael Crabtree, who was with San Francisco

49ers. This play won the game for the Seahawks and has become known as the

"immaculate deflection" by football fans. One of the reasons that this play was so widely

known is because after the deflection Richard Sherman gave a choke sign that was

directed to the 49ers quarterback, Colin Kaepernick. Then, Sherman had an outburst

during his post-game interview where he publicly ridiculed Michael Crabtree.[5] Even

musicians write lyrics to describe the conflict of their lives or write political lyrics to deal

with social conflict within the culture. Shane McAnally, Nicolle Galyon and Ross

Copperman wrote the song "Female" which is sung by Keith Urban. The song made its

debut in November 2017, almost one month after the #metoo movement started on

Twitter. "Female" was written to speak into the conflict of sexual harassment and social

biases women face, especially in the workplace.[6]

With social media, people are now invited to participate in conflict in public

ways. Social media is filled with "Twitter wars" and Facebook rants. Bette Midler and

Donald Trump are known to bash and mock each other on Twitter. In June 2019, Bette

Midler tweeted a poem that ridiculed both the President and the First Lady, Melania

Trump. In this "war," she received many praises from anti-Trump followers and backlash

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[5] Gregg Rosenthal, "Richard Sherman's Tip Leads Seahawks To Super Bowl," NFL, January 19, 2014, http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap2000000315447/article/richard-shermans-tip-leads-seahawks-to-super-bowl.

[6] Carena Liptak, "Story Behind The Song: Keith Urban, 'Female,'" The Boot, June 14, 2018, https://theboot.com/keith-urban-female-lyrics/.

from pro-Trump followers.[7] Children are being taught to not read the comments found on the internet because they often cause deep conflict. In 2018, Disney produced the movie *Ralph Breaks the Internet.* The main character, Ralph, read through the comments and became very upset over what he read. One of the other characters then approached Ralph and said, "The first rule of the internet; never read the comments section."[8]

The leaders of American society are steeped in conflict. In October 2020, a week before election day for the next President of the United States, conflict management experts warned the American people for the potential of high conflict and violence after the election results were announced.[9] The director of the Conflict Resolution Program, Hrair Balian, said, "We have become intolerant, we have started dehumanizing the other side. We are at the edge of an abyss, and we better see this and try to step back before it is too late."[10] Due to this edge in American culture and the desire to be prepared for all possibilities, two thousand volunteers who have been trained in how to de-escalate conflict monitored the polls throughout Pennsylvania on Election Day.[11] Citizens of the

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[7] Bruce Haring, "Bette Midler Continues Trump Twitter Wars With Doggerel Poem On Melania," Deadline, June 19, 2019, https://deadline.com/2019/06/bette-midler-donald-trump-poem-melania-1202635422/.

[8] *Ralph Breaks The Internet*, directed by Phil Johnston and Rich Moore (Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2018), https://www.netflix.com/watch/80221640.

[9] Joel Rose, "'Guns, Protests and Elections Do Not Mix': Conflict Experts See Rising Warning Signs," NPR, October 29, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/10/29/928791633/guns-protests-and-elections-do-not-mix-conflict-experts-see-rising-warning-signs.

[10] Rose, "Guns, Protests and Elections Do Not Mix."

[11] David Wenner, "Hundreds of Volunteers, Lawyers, Clergy Ready to Respond to Election Day Conflict in PA," Penn Live, October 29, 2020, https://www.pennlive.com/elections/2020/10/hundreds-of-volunteers-lawyers-clergy-ready-to-respond-to-election-day-conflict-in-pa.html.

United States of America are polarized over political issues that creates a climate rich for conflict not only to exist, but to escalate.[12]

Politicians, pop culture stars, and even religious leaders gain popularity through their controversy. The right conflict, at the right time, can catapult or destroy a person's status in society. Tabloids make their money on the conflict they reveal, real or fabricated. OK! Magazine, which is filled with celebrity gossip and conflict, especially details and rumors of divorce, sells over 149,000 copies per issue.[13] Conflict sells.

Culture influences the church. Our culture is flooded with conflict and that conflict overflows into churches. The goal of this research is to help the church to learn to not romanticize or exaggerate conflict, but to harness it for personal and organizational maturity and other positive outcomes. Conflict can bring life and vitality to the church instead of divisiveness and despair, but it has to be approached intentionally.

(Re)Signing Conflict

In order for the church to shift to an understanding of conflict as an opportunity for growth and development, it must learn to (re)sign conflict from the negative to the positive.[14] Johan Galtung, who founded the International Peace Research Institute, Olso in 1959, also founded the Journal of Peace Research in 1964. Galtung has become known

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[12] Rose, "Guns, Protests and Elections Do Not Mix."

[13] "Ok! Magazine," ABC, accessed June 24, 2019, https://www.abc.org.uk/product/6465.

[14] Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth a Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 22.

as the "father of peace studies"[15] and wrote the following poem to challenge people to

rethink conflict:

> If you cannot remove conflict from life,
> why not adjust your thinking about it?
> If you can't beat it, join it.
> Why not try and see conflict
> As the salt of life,
> As the big energizer,
> The tickler,
> The tantalizer,
> Rather than a bothersome nuisance,
> As a noise in a perfect channel,
> As disturbing ripples in otherwise quiet water?
> Why not treat conflict
> As a form of life,
> Particularly since we all know
> That it is precisely during the periods of our lives
> When we are exposed
> To a conflict that really challenges us,
> And that we finally are able to master,
> That we feel most alive.
> (Galtung)[16]

The word "conflict" creates many emotions—emotions that can be difficult to

name and describe. Most people have a negative connotation of conflict, believing a well-

ordered and smooth life does not include any bumps that come from conflict.[17] According

to Galtung, conflict does not have to be a nuisance, a problem, or even trouble. Conflict is

life and, as Galtung said, people need to adjust their thinking about it. Conflict has

potential, it is a challenge, and it makes people feel alive. It can energize, tickle, and

season relationships.

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[15] "Johan Galtung," Galtung Institute For Peace Theory and Peace Practice, accessed May 23, 2019, https://www.galtung-institut.de/en/home/johan-galtung/.

[16] Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, 4.

[17] Dudley Weeks, *The Essential Steps To Conflict Resolution* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), 4.

When conflict is (re)signed using a new metaphor, it helps the church to shift the way it thinks about conflict and how it affects others. Metaphors help people express and comprehend their experiences and emotions.[18] The metaphors used in describing conflict can change how people respond to it. For example, some people might see conflict as being pushed in front of a speeding train. With this metaphor, conflict is understood as something that destroys anyone in its path, and this causes people to be apprehensive and fearful of conflict. If conflict is seen as a game of war, it brings to mind images of weapons, bloody engagement, and a game to be won. People who have this view could become competitive toward each other, attempting to create one clear "winner." Obviously, neither of these metaphors for conflict lead people toward healthy conflict resolution.

The Latin word for "conflict" is "conflictus." The literal translation means "striking together."[19] Every metaphor has positive and negative connotations. An unhealthy, or negative, understanding of this metaphor would be when two rocks strike against each other and they crumble and turn into rubble. With this interpretation, conflict will always be a falling apart or falling out. When a church responds to conflict in ways that causes it to crumble, it will be filled with pews of gravel. A healthier metaphor for conflict might be the image of two rocks that strike against each other and thus create a spark. Sparks are powerful because they ignite, which provides the church the opportunity for growth, for relationships to be deepened, for creativity to flow. It opens a

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[18] James Geary, *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2011), 11.

[19] Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Conflict," accessed June 24, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conflict.

door to a whole new world of possibilities. Just as Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another," conflict, when people strike against each other to create sparks, can sharpen everyone involved. Through this perspective, if the church learns how to strike the rocks, conflict is an opportunity and is filled with potential.[20]

Another more constructive metaphor for conflict would be a rod and string. When the string is bound to each end of the rod and pulled tight, it creates tension in the rod. With the tension, that rod and string can become a bow. Bows are used to shoot arrows. In this tension, conflict can become a weapon wielded to kill and destroy the perceived enemy. However, the tension in the rod and string can also be turned into a harp to create music. When the church makes music out of their conflict, they learn to play the same song, learn the harmonies, and discover how to be in unison. Conflict can destroy and kill, or it can be used to create a beautiful soundtrack.[21] The metaphors used during conflict will greatly affect how the church approaches and manages conflict, which can make a difference in positive conflict resolution.

Steps Toward Healthy Conflict Resolution

This work will study different conflict management strategies and explore communal practices that can help churches use conflict to bring positive effects to the congregation. The next chapter will look at typical conflict management methods practiced in the church and their success or failure in positively affecting the body of Christ. Chapter Three will examine workplace conflict, conflict management goals and

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[20] Weeks, *The Essential Steps To Conflict Resolution*, 7.

[21] Leonard Sweet, "Orcas Island Advance," DMIN748: Spiritual Leadership in Christian Community (Class Lecture at Portland Seminary, Orcas Island, WA, May 29, 2019).

methods, and what the church can learn from these business practices. The fourth chapter will study marriage counseling, conflict management methods recommended by marriage counselors, and what the church can learn from marital conflict management. From there, Chapter Five will look at conflict management in the Scriptures through the teachings of Jesus Christ and through the examples of people in the Old and New Testament. Then, the sixth chapter of this work will conclude with different practices and trainings the church can implement to help prepare the church to choose healthy conflict management in the future.

CHAPTER 2:

CHURCH CONFLICT

The church is a collection of people and where there are people there will be conflict.[1] Often, conflict within the church can elicit surprise. People accept the fact that there is conflict within their personal family but struggle with the reality that there is also conflict within a congregational family.[2] The church will never be conflict-free, nor should it want to be. "Conflict is essential to, ineradicable from, and inevitable in human life; and the source, cause, and process of conflict can be turned from life-destroying to life-building ends."[3] Conflict can provide an opportunity for spiritual growth for both individuals and the local congregation.[4]

Because conflict is inevitable and a natural part of being a church family, there have been many books and papers written about how pastors and leaders can help local congregations navigate conflict. This chapter will focus on how Christian authors and leaders address conflict by examining their understanding of the different causes of conflict, types of church conflict, and the unhealthy and healthy methods of conflict management.

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[1] Michael Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 11.

[2] Doug Bixby and Karen A. McClintock, *Navigating the Nonsense: Church Conflict and Triangulation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 16, Kindle.

[3] Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, 5.

[4] Tara Klena Barthel and David V. Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2012), xviii.

Definition of Conflict

There are several different perspectives on the definition of conflict between religious leaders. Their definition of conflict is determined by what they believe is the source of conflict. This section will look at three different definitions of conflict and how that correlates to the causes of conflict.

Ken Sande is a Christian mediator and a lawyer,[5] the president of Relational Wisdom 360, and the founder of Peacemaker Ministries. Kevin Johnson is the Pastor of Emmaus Road Church, has served as a senior editor at Bethany House Publishing, and is a successful author. Together, Sande and Johnson wrote the book *Resolving Everyday Conflict.* In this book, conflict is defined as something that "happens when you are at odds with another person over what you think, want, or do."[6] The source of conflict begins when someone does not get what they want, which they call selfishness.[7] In their framework, the root of all conflict is selfishness and the trigger for that selfishness is when we do not get what we want because of diversity, misunderstandings, and sin.[8]

Speed Leas, who has spent over 40 years as a conflict management consultant for local churches,[9] wrote *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church* together with Paul Kittlaus. They define conflict as "when two pieces of matter try to occupy the

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[5] Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), chap. 1, Kindle.

[6] Sande and Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict*, chap. 1.

[7] Sande and Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict*, chap. 1.

[8] Sande and Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict*, chap. 1.

[9] "A Pioneering Spirit; Speed Leas Celebrates Four Decades of Conflict Management Consulting," Alban, Duke University, January 4, 2017, https://alban.org/archive/a-pioneering-spirit-speed-leas-celebrates-four-decades-of-conflict-management-consulting/.

same space at the same time."[10] An example would be two people disagreeing on who should be asked to volunteer in children's ministries. The children's pastor uses volunteers that do not currently have children, but a congregational member is frustrated because they want to serve in children's ministries to be with their child. These are two methods of volunteer recruitment that are trying to occupy the "same space at the same time." There are numerous causes of conflict within a congregation because two people or groups can attempt to occupy the same space over many different issues, such as current goals, how to care for others, finances, church management, ministry philosophies, and places to serve.

Kittlaus and Leas add, "Another way to look at conflict is to see it as behavior that produces a barrier to another person's attempt to meet his need."[11] In this expanded definition, conflict occurs when once person feels as though their goals will not be achieved or their needs will not be met. One classic example of this would be when a couple brings their toddler into the sanctuary for the worship service, but the child is talkative and fussy while the pastor preaches. This could cause conflict because the congregants seated around this family may feel that the child's behavior prevents them from being able to hear and engage in the sermon. The parents of the child may experience conflict because they are recipients of frustrated looks and numerous sighs when what they need is empathy and grace with their toddler, who struggles with severe separation anxiety. Both parties in this example feel as though their needs are not being met and results in conflict.

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[10] Paul Kittlaus and Speed Leas, *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1973), 28.

[11] Kittlaus and Leas, *Church Fights,* 29.

David Augsburger, professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Fuller

Theological Seminary and author of *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures,* says, "Conflict

is a crisis that forces us to recognize explicitly that we live with multiple realities and

must negotiate a common reality; that we bring to each situation differing—frequently

contrasting—stories and must create together a single shared story with a role for each of

us."[12] Conflict happens when two stories collide and the people involved must rework

their stories into a merged one. Conflict is a coming together. The goal of conflict

resolution is to rework and merge the stories, even if they are contrasting, and to redefine

the roles of the people involved to develop one story.

Generally, in the Christian community, there are two different thoughts on the

definition of conflict. The first is that conflict is caused by selfishness and therefore all

conflict is sin. The second is that conflict is an occurrence in relationships that is not in

itself sinful but can quickly lead to sin. In order for pastors and leaders to help their

congregations navigate conflict successfully, they must understand their particular

community's definition of conflict because this will affect how, or even if, the church

works toward resolution.

Types of Conflict

There are several different types of conflict. To have healthy and successful

conflict resolution, it can be helpful if the people involved are able to discern the type of

conflict in the situation. Dr. Norma Cook Everest has been a professor at Wartburg

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[12] Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, 11.

Theological Seminary for over 35 years.[13] In her book *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration,* she names seven types of conflict within the context of the local church: intrapersonal, interpersonal, mission, value, belief, ministry, and truth.[14]

Figure 1 reveals that these different types of conflict can be narrowed down into two groups: relational and philosophical. Relational conflict includes intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts, while philosophical conflict includes conflict over mission, value, belief, ministry, and truth.
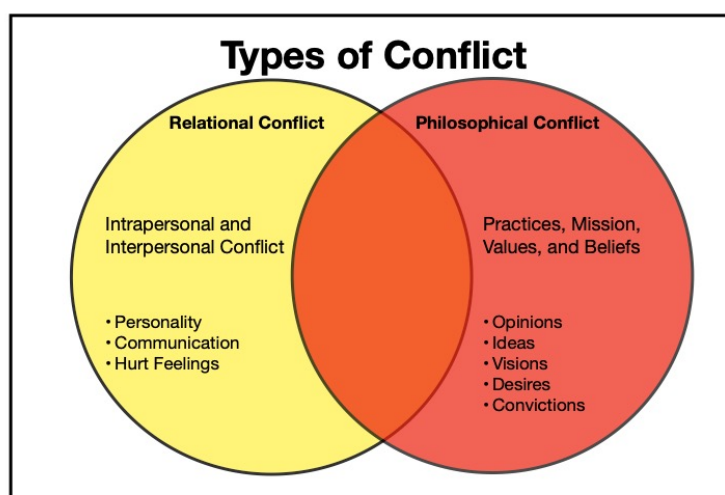
Figure 1: Types of Conflicts Within Churches

Relational Conflict

Intrapersonal conflict is relational conflict that comes from inside an individual person.[15] It is an inward and personal battle within one's own heart and mind. Intrapersonal conflict can easily be projected onto other people and situations.

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[13] "Bio," Norma Cook Everest, accessed January 5, 2021, http://www.normacookeverist.com/?page_id=528.

[14] Norma Cook Everest, *Church Conflict: From Contention To Collaboration* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), chap. 2, Kindle.

[15] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

Throughout all situations, it is important to address the inward conflict because it will affect how conflict with others will be resolved.[16] This type of conflict is best dealt with through friends, mentors, and counselors[17] in one-on-one moments of time. If a person is unable to address intrapersonal conflict, then all other types of conflict will be mismanaged, or avoided entirely.[18]

Interpersonal conflict is relational between several individuals. A few causes of interpersonal conflict are personality clashes, diversity, communication breakdown, and sin.

Personalities—People should celebrate that there are many different personalities. God created people to be different. However, differences, or even similarities, in personalities contribute to the creation of conflict. Florence Littauer has named four types of personalities: sanguine, choleric, melancholy, and phlegmatic. Through a test, a person can be classified as one of these personalities or a combination of two. Figure 2 gives an overview of these four different personalities.[19]

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[16] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

[17] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

[18] This work is dedicated to interpersonal rather than intrapersonal conflict. Church leaders that want to prioritize intrapersonal conflict would have spiritual and professional counselors available for congregants to meet with.

[19] Florence Littauer, *Personality Plus* (Grand Rapids; MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 24-27.

Personality Overviews

Popular Sanguine
• Optimist
• Talker
• Extrovert

Attributes:
• Cheerful
• Storyteller
• Enthusiastic
• Good sense of Humor
• Childlike
• Emotional and Demonstrative
• Life of the Party

Powerful Choleric
• Optimist
• Doer
• Extrovert

Attributes:
• Natural Leader
• Independent and Self-sufficient
• Strong willed and Decisive
• Dynamic and Active
• Unemotional
• Compulsive need for change
• Exudes Confidence

Peaceful Phlegmatic
• Pessimist
• Watcher
• Introvert

Attributes:
• Calm, Cool, and Collected
• Sympathetic and Kind
• Quiet and Witty
• Patient and Consistent
• Easygoing and Relaxed
• Low-key Personality
• Keep emotions hidden

Perfect Melancholy
• Pessimist
• Thinker
• Introvert

Attributes:
• Analytical
• Artistic and Musical
• Sensitive to others
• Idealistic
• Conscientious
• Philosophical and Poetic
• Deep and Thoughtful

Figure 2: Personality Overview from Florence Littauer

Two people with similar personalities who work together can easily result in conflict. For instance, when two powerful cholerics are in the room, each set on achieving their goals, they can collide when their goals or method to success differ.[20] Conflict between personalities can also erupt when different personalities clash. This can happen in something as simple as a popular sanguine pastor deciding to ask a peaceful phlegmatic to come to the stage to participate in a sermon illustration. The phlegmatic would rather go unseen and remain in the comfort of the shadows in the pew while the sanguine pastor would be upset with the discomfort and lack of energy from the person selected.

Diversity—In the church, there is diversity in education levels, social status, citizenship, language, religious background, economic status, and many other variables. A congregation could experience relational conflict over diversity on a wedding day. The engaged couple asked the media team from Sunday to attend their wedding to help with

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[20] Florence Littauer, *Personality Plus* (Grand Rapids; MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 61.

the sound and picture slide show. The media team arrived an hour early for the wedding, but an hour after the wedding was supposed to be over, the bride is still at the hotel getting dressed. The bride is Haitian, where it is culturally acceptable for the bride to be two hours late to her own wedding, while the media team was clueless and felt like their time was wasted.

While diversity is crucial to the life of the church and a picture of the Kingdom of God, it can lead to conflict because diversity has the potential to bring in new, and possibly opposing, ideas, perspectives, opinions, goals, and ethics. Diversity ensures that an echo chamber is not possible and provides the opportunity for different voices to be heard. However, often people are drawn to others who are similar because there is the hope and desire that their relationships will remain nice and tidy, whereas diversity can add complication.[21]

Communication—Miscommunication, the lack of communication, or even over-communicating leads to confusion and ultimately conflict. The inability to clearly articulate expectations, experiences, emotions, and data, or the feeling that what people say goes unheard is frustrating and painful for all parties. At the annual church meeting, the congregation elected a new member to the church board. As the months pass, this new member has not received information about the board meeting times and locations but hears about them afterward. He approached the lead pastor and was told that the next meeting invite would be in his email inbox in the next week. Four months have passed, and the new board member has not received one invite and has missed all the meetings. He has gotten agitated and frustrated with the lead pastor and has sent in his resignation

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[21] Tim Harford, *Messy: The Power of Disorder* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2016), 54.

to the members of the board. Communication breakdown, even if it is unintentional, causes hurt and frustration within the relationship.

Sin—Sin causes a broken relationship with God and others. It should not be a surprise that it will cause conflict within the body of Christ. Some sin comes in like a tyrannosaurus rex, tearing apart everything in sight. These sins have life-changing consequences on the church, like a pastor having an affair or sexual harassment of children. Other sins creep in slowly and become disastrous over time, like pride and arrogance. Sin, either slowly or quickly, causes conflict and destroys relationships.

People who experience interpersonal conflict usually cope in one of four ways: withdrawal from relationships that could ultimately lead to withdrawal from the church, rationalization of behaviors, living in denial that something is wrong within the relationship, or taking on aggressive behaviors.[22] These are not healthy responses that preserve the unity of the church. When relational conflict is not addressed or resolved, pastors and leaders will see divisions created within the congregation and relationships fall apart.

Philosophical Conflict

The final five types of conflict—mission, belief, value, ministry, and truth—are conflicts that revolve around issues. These types of conflict can also be called substantive conflict.[23] Although a local church may fall under one denomination and adhere to a proscribed way of understanding these five issue-types, there will always be differences

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[22] Kittlaus and Leas, *Church Fights,* 118.

[23] Richard J. Krejcir, "Types of Conflict," Church Leadership, 2007, http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42400.

of interpretation of these issues, which will result in conflict. The church is shaped by how conflict over these issues is resolved.[24] For example, a man in the church is upset because there are children playing in the foyer before worship services. He values quiet and meditative places of worship and the children, in his opinion, are ruining the atmosphere. The local church he attends was founded on the core value of family. How the church responds to this will affect the future of the church. The local church's value of family will need to be changed if the children are not given the freedom to play, speak, or interact with others in the foyer.

The Church has been called to fulfill Christ's mission. The problem is that many people disagree what the mission looks like, the goals of the mission, and how to fulfill it.[25] This is mission conflict within the church. The ministry leaders have decided that they need to be more discipleship-focused, but they disagree on the goals. One person believes the goal is to help people become more biblically literate, another person wants to draw families closer together, and the pastor wants discipleship to challenge people on their beliefs. They all believe discipleship is the mission but are in conflict on the specific goals of the new discipleship ministry.

The second philosophical conflict is beliefs. This is a difficult conflict to navigate because people hold their theology, especially about worship and evangelism, with a firm grasp.[26] John Wesley, the father of Methodism, believed that there are four founding

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[24] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

[25] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

[26] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

blocks of theology: Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.[27] This was later named the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral." Although Protestant churches have the same Scripture, people come from different traditions, reasoning, and experiences, which means that people will interpret Scripture through difference lenses, which can lead to conflict. Some people, in accordance with their experiences and traditions, take a literal translation of Genesis 1-3 and believe that God created the earth in six twenty-four-hour days. There are scientists who have explored the universe and studied supernovae that have exploded. Due to logic and experience, they believe that Genesis 1-3 is be understood as a metaphor. These two approaches to creation have sparked deep conflict between congregational members.

Value is another type of philosophical conflict. Everyone has their own values that are determined by where they put their worth.[28] People's values affect decisions they make on a daily basis.[29] A church board has to make cuts to the budget that will require them to lay off one of the associate pastors. Many people in the church board disagree on which staff member to lay off because they value different ministries. The woman with three elementary children values the children's pastor, whereas a person on the board with an elderly parent values the associate pastor who makes nursing home visits every week.

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[27] H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 77.

[28] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

[29] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

Ministry conflict happens when the church has the same goals but disagrees on the means to fulfill those goals.[30] All believers in Jesus, not just clergy, are to be in ministry, but are often in conflict on how to minister. The pastor and leaders of a local congregation have decided that it is Christ's mission for them to serve and love the neighborhood within a mile radius of their sanctuary, but they all disagree on how do this ministry. One person believes that the church should go door to door and pray with the neighbors. Another member believes they should hold a huge block party and invite the neighborhood. The pastor thinks the church should start an after-school program for the neighborhood kids. They all have great ideas, but they cannot be done at the same time due to limited resources and the board must decide how to navigate this ministry conflict.

The church serves a trustworthy God, and His followers should be trustworthy, but there will still be conflict over truth. Often people believe that they share facts, but those facts come with different lenses, history, opinions, and emotions. "The way we see is conditioned literally by our point of view, where we are standing."[31] This requires pastors and leads to acknowledge that the truth is often hard to discern because they will never only receive the facts. Two congregational members witness a family leave in the middle of Sunday worship. One congregational member saw the husband rub his ears as he walks out and believes he left because the music was too loud. The other congregational member saw the wife hand him a tissue and believes they left because his allergies were agitated. Even though both people observed the same thing, they had their

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[30] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

[31] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

own perspective. Their difference in the truth leads to a heated conversation over the sound level of worship and the use of real lilies in the sanctuary.

Both Relational and Philosophical Conflict

Often, conflict is a combination of several types of conflict.[32] Philosophical conflict can easily become relational conflict as well. It is important to look deep into the situation, name the source of the conflict, and decide if it is relational or philosophical. A youth pastor is meeting with the leadership team to discuss the fellowship activities for the year. They all believe that fellowship is important for teens, but experience ministry conflict because they disagree on how to do fellowship. One person believes that fellowship should include discipleship and worship aspects with a night of worship, whereas another team member wants to focus on fun and take the students on a scavenger hunt. Through this discussion, personality differences surface and now the situation is both a relational and philosophical conflict. The youth pastor has witnessed the situation and determined the types of conflict at play in the meeting. This determination helps the pastor understand the situation[33] and take steps to select the healthiest and wisest path to conflict resolution.

Conflict Levels

Conflict exists in several different levels. These levels are determined by the location of the conflict. Michael Hare has a PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution and

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[32] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

[33] Everest, *Church Conflict,* chap. 2.

has spent fifteen years as a conflict consultant to local churches. In his book *When Church Conflict Happens,* he named five levels of conflict: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, and structural.[34] Whereas the types of conflict determine where the conflict begins, conflict levels reveal how deep the conflict is in the congregation. It is important for pastors and leaders to know who is involved in the conflict, and that can be determined when they gather information to determine the conflict level.

Intrapersonal level is conflict that takes place within a single person. It is within an individual's internal emotions, thoughts, reflexes, and heart that the conflict exists. When conflict moves from inside a person to include others, it becomes interpersonal. At this level, the conflict exists between two to five people.[35] The next level is intragroup, which is conflict within a single group of people. When the situation exists between two or more groups within the local congregation, it becomes an intergroup level conflict. The final level is a structural level, where conflict has manifested itself in the entire local church. At this level, the conflict is highly significant and points to organizational and infrastructure inadequacies within the congregation.[36]

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[34] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 47.

[35] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 47.

[36] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 69.
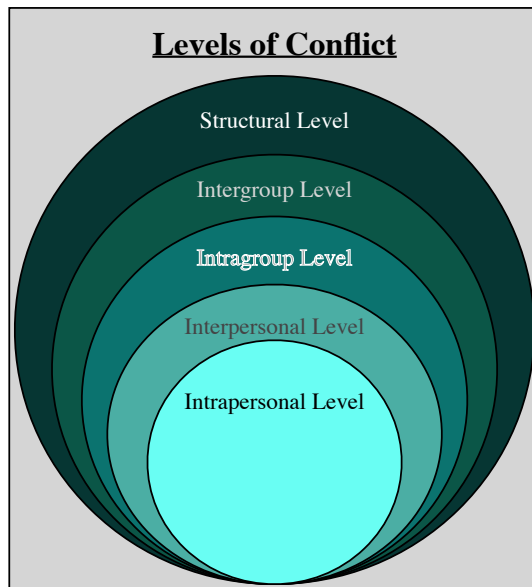
Figure 3 Michael Hare Levels of Conflict

As seen on Figure 3,[37] conflict exists in all different levels within a church.

Church conflict is complex, and one conflict can include multiple conflict levels.[38]

Conflict, if it goes unaddressed, can grow from one level to the next easily and quickly.

Pastors and leaders will use different methods of conflict resolution for the different

levels. For example, a pastor would not use collaboration for an intrapersonal conflict.

The level of conflict helps determine the best strategy for resolution.

Methods of Conflict Management

There are many different methods of conflict management. There is not a

mathematical equation to conflict management; it cannot be broken down to A+B=C.

Conflict can be simple and straightforward, but it can also be messy and complicated.

This section will first explore unhealthy responses to conflict management and how they

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[37] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 47.

[38] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 76.

are detrimental to conflict resolution. Then, it will examine different healthy methods proposed by experts in congregational conflict management.

Unhealthy Responses in Conflict Management

There are many ways that people can respond to conflict in unhealthy ways. Jim Van Yperen has walked local churches through conflict and reconciliation for more than 10 years. He is also the executive director and founder of Metanoia Ministries, which helps churches in conflict. He has named five unhealthy responses to conflict: passive, evasive, defensive, and aggressive. These responses do not help the conflict resolution process and can be detrimental to finding a healthy resolution.

A passive response to conflict is avoidance. People who chose to respond passively are effectively making themselves a martyr in the situation by sacrificing their needs, their relationships, and even the truth.[39] "Silence is not golden in the church. Keeping silent is a passive form of lying. It is deceitful. Believers are called to speak the truth in love. Allowing false impressions about people or circumstances engenders more discord, not less."[40] A passive response, staying silent about needs, desires, and hurts, can be justified as "keeping the peace" during the conflict, but ultimately it is a selfish response because it is dishonest. Conflict cannot be resolved when someone is pretending. Passiveness is fueled by fear—fear of being judged and fear of how others will respond.[41] Ultimately, it only fuels the conflict by leaving it unresolved.

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[39] Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2002), 113.

[40] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 114.

[41] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 114.

Evasion is another form of conflict avoidance that includes redirection or diversion. When people respond to conflict with evasion, they will recognize that there is conflict, but will attempt to minimize, divert, or manipulate it.[42] Evasive responses limit relationships to only the people who agree to be on the same side of the conflict.[43] Conflict evasion leads to rumors, blame, rationalization of wrong behavior, and dishonesty, and can potentially lead to an explosion in the church.[44]

A defensive response to conflict is a self-centered response in which one person is concerned about their reputation, power, position, and "being right."[45] In this scenario, conflict is resolved through competition. It becomes an "us-versus-them" plan of attack, and creates a win-lose result to the conflict.[46] Collaboration and compromise go out the window. A power vacuum is created, with everyone competing to be "right" and fighting for authority.[47] "Defensive responders can be argumentative, persuasive, and manipulative. Defensive responders are outspoken in their opinions; they will often take extreme arguments to prove a point."[48] Conflict becomes twisted and filled with arrogance, pride, lies, and dishonesty. Often, people who respond defensively will twist

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[42] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 126.

[43] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 126.

[44] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 125.

[45] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 140.

[46] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 141.

[47] Kittlaus and Leas, *Church Fights,* 136.

[48] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 141.

the Scriptures to justify their perspective.[49] Conflict cannot be resolved in a healthy

manner when there is no care for the other people involved.

An aggressive response is an attack method of conflict management. There is no

avoidance, but a head-on affront to the situation. "To be aggressive means to be eager to

fight; to initiate confrontation; attack, argue, or use emotional, spiritual, and physical

force to defeat opposition. An aggressive conflict responder is hostile to any hint of

criticism or disagreement."[50] An aggressive response is a competitive response to gain

more power and control and will easily forfeit relationships to achieve a victory.[51] People

who respond aggressively to conflict see the world in "right and wrong" or "black and

white" with little or no room for any "gray" areas. There is no compromise or

collaboration.[52] When the goal of conflict management is to "win," there is no concern

for others, peace, or unity. Aggression will not lead to resolution because the situation

was not truly addressed by everyone involved. The conflict will remain unresolved.

Another unhealthy response to conflict is denial and avoidance. Across many

cultures and societies, these are the most common responses to conflict.[53] People respond

to conflict like a turtle: they withdraw into themselves to avoid the conflict around them.

Conflict management requires energy, but conflict avoidance does as well.[54] Withdrawal

from the conflict and the people involved will suffocate and exhaust everyone. Energy is

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[49] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 141.

[50] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 155.

[51] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 155.

[52] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 156.

[53] Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, 18.

[54] Kittlaus and Leas, *Church Fights,* 127.

wasted when people try to figure out how to hide away from conflict, avoid the people involved, and monitor every action and word.

Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus write, "Avoiding conflict reduces the total creativity of the group. New ideas will be few and far between. Old ideas will not get reexamined."[55] Conflict avoidance stifles group chemistry and momentum. It prevents critical thinking and creates a roadblock from forgiveness being received or given. When conflict is avoided, there is typically no restoration, but rather a heartbroken and angry stalemate.

One form of avoidance is "church hopping," which has become a popular method people choose to cope with congregational conflict. People decide to not deal with the conflict within their current church congregation and instead leave to find another.[56] Since conflict is inescapable and people tend to view conflict negatively, transferring from one congregation to the next does not provide an escape from the hurt and frustration of the past because they have left the previous conflict unreconciled. When this happens, people rarely find a church or community where they feel at home. They have never put down roots in a church family or learned how to reconcile their conflict in healthy ways.

Homeowners gladly invest in their house for home improvement projects, whereas renters rarely invest in their property because it is temporary—eventually they will leave. In the same way, church hoppers do not invest in their church because it is not their home. Church hopping is not only detrimental to the individuals but also to the

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[55] Kittlaus and Leas, *Church Fights,* 131.

[56] John Bevere, *The Bait of Satan* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House. 2014), 59.

church: ministry leaders are not trained, relationships are shallow, and accountability is nonexistent. Church hopping because of the inability to deal with conflict will continue until the individual learns how to manage it in healthy ways.

Another way to respond to conflict is to repress it. One who would engage in conflict repression is typically someone who has the respect of the people and is in a position of power and authority. During conflict repression, the leader must be stronger than the conflict itself, coercing the group away from the conflict.[57] It is an attempt to hide and shrink the elephant in the room. However, conflict repression usually comes at a high cost. It is draining, prolonging the pain from the unresolved hurt for everyone involved, including the leader.

Unresolved Conflict

Unresolved conflict is dangerous to the church because conflict leaves people wounded. A small scratch, when not dealt with properly, can lead to a serious infection. Wounds prevent the church from living in community. Children fall, scrape their knees, and cry. In that scenario, 99.5% of their body is functioning perfectly with no pain. However, the child's attention is focused on the 0.5% that hurts. Wounds demand attention. What happens when wounds heal? They become scars. Dr. David McDonald, in his book *Then. Now. Next.*, says, "There is a difference between a wound and a scar. You can do nothing with a wound but nurse it or aggravate it. But a scar provides additional protection for a sensitive area; the scar tissue becomes among the strongest on

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[57] Kittlaus and Leas, *Church Fights,* 133.

your body. Scars are proof that we not only endured, but that we're healthy once more."[58] Scars are a testimony of God's deliverance, healing, and restoration. However, wounds cannot heal if they are continually reopened. When conflict is unresolved and forgiveness has not been extended or received, relational wounds fester instead of healing. Unresolved conflict leads to disunity in the church.

Unresolved conflict has the potential to break apart the unity of the church. The Apostle Paul calls the church in Corinth to unity in 1 Corinthians 1:10. He said, "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose." God desires for people to live as one, in unity—a unity of Spirit, a unity of mind, and a unity of purpose. One of the greatest temptations of the church is to become divided. Bruce Marshall, Lehman Professor of Christian Doctrine at Perkins Theological Seminary writes, "the divided church might be regarded as the most crucial of contemporary theological problems."[59] Churches have accepted disunity and see it as the norm for the community.[60] The church justifies its divisions as a representation of the Kingdom of God, but it truly is not. Followers of Jesus Christ must work together to prevent unresolved conflict so that they can live in unity and avoid divisiveness.

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[58] David McDonald, *Then. Now. Next.: A Biblical Vision Of The Church, The Kingdom, And The Future* (N.P.: Independently Published, 2017), 42.

[59] Bruce Marshall, "The Disunity Of The Church And The Credibility Of The Gospel," *Theology Today* 50, no. 1 (1993): 78. EBSCOhost.

[60] Jeffrey J. Kloha, "The Lordship Of Christ And The Unity Of The Church," *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 4 (2013): 276, EBSCOhost.

Unresolved conflict interferes with the ministry and the mission of the church. Part of the witness to the world is the unity of the church. When conflict causes disunity, the divided church then becomes a distorted witness to the world, misrepresenting the Gospel.[61] The energy wasted on disunity caused by unresolved conflict should be spent caring and serving those in the church and the community. When conflict goes unresolved it harms unity, church mission, and people.

Healthy Responses in Conflict Management Methods

How people respond to conflict is a choice. When people choose a healthy response to conflict management, they see conflict as an opportunity provided by God to bring growth, maturity, and transformation into the image of Jesus.[62] For conflict to be truly resolved, it must be approached with methods that show concern for others and that are not plays for power and control, and the people involved need to act with integrity and honesty.

A collaborative strategy is one method of healthy conflict management. Collaboration provides the space and time for everyone to be heard, provides shared resources, and allows everyone to contribute to the final outcome. This method helps people to work through their avoidance or aggressive tendencies so that the decisions made are rational.[63] A collaborative method of conflict management is when people work

[61] Marshall, "The Disunity Of The Church And The Credibility Of The Gospel," 84.

[62] Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts,* 29.

[63] Kittlaus and Leas, *Church Fights*, 143.

together through the conflict in a noncompetitive attitude to bring about a result in which everyone feels at peace.

David Augsburger has developed a method of conflict management called "Care-fronting." Care-fronting is a unification of care and confrontation.[64] Typically these words are not combined, but separated, as people believe confrontation will dilute care and care negates conflict. Care-fronting is an honest conversation about conflict that is done through and with love and care. Augsburger writes, "Care-fronting seeks to stay connected while refusing to give up on the goals. It is caring—I want to stay in relationship with you, and confronting—I want you to know where I stand and what I'm feeling, needing, valuing, and wanting."[65] This method requires genuine and mutual concern for the people involved in the conflict and is centered around communication. Care-fronting requires creativity to create a path of love and honesty where the relationship can blossom through conflict.

Augsburger's care-fronting is similar to Jim Van Yperen's approach to conflict management he names "authentic communication." This method is a form of communication that speaks truth in love and hears truth and love.[66] To speak truth in love does not mean that people negate difficult and hard topics or situations, but to confront in a way that gently leads toward restoration.[67] Authentic communication requires

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[64] Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, 9.

[65] Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, 17.

[66] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 203.

[67] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 203.

examination of the conflict. Van Yperen suggests that the first thing people should do when they are in conflict is accept and address three assertions.

First, admit that the problem is unknown. It is dangerous to assume exactly what the conflict is immediately. It takes time and reflection. Second, recognize that both parties play in the conflict and hold responsibility. Third, the surface conflict might not be the root of the issue.[68] The next step in authentic communication is submission to both God and God's people. In this step, a person invites God and the people of God to examine and purify their hearts before they approach anyone else.[69] After these two steps, it is time for confrontation that is done with truth and love. "Love requires saying hard words in very direct ways."[70] Truth is often difficult to share, but love requires it.

Ken Sande proposes a five-step process of conflict management that is sourced from Matthew 18:15-20 called "The Matthew 18 Process." In this process, it is important to keep the people involved in the conflict to a minimum. The first step in this process is to overlook minor offenses. There are times when conflict can be resolved unilaterally, without involving others, by giving up personal rights and extending grace.[71] If the conflict cannot be resolved in that step, then move to step two: talk in private. This is when a person approaches another to discuss the conflict. Forgiveness is offered and received, an agreement is met, and the relationship continues.[72] If a private meeting does

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[68] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 209.

[69] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 210.

[70] Van Yperen, *Making Peace,* 214.

[71] Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 187.

[72] Sande, The Peacemaker, 187.

not resolve the conflict, the third step is to ask others to get involved. There will be times when it is important to add intermediaries, mediators, and arbitrators into the mix to help bridge communication and understanding to help resolve the conflict.[73] If these steps fail, the fourth step is to take it to the church. This is when the conflict is taken to a group of leaders within a local congregation. These leaders are to hold the people involved in the conflict accountable and help guide them into peaceful resolution.[74] The last step is extreme and is to only be used when conflict cannot be resolved in the other steps. Step five is to treat them as a non-believer. "If a person behaves like a nonbeliever would—by disregarding the authority of Scripture and of Christ's Church—he should be treated as if he were a nonbeliever."[75] In this strategy, it is believed that when conflict has escalated this deep, it is rooted in sin and the hope is that this step will help people realize the seriousness of their sins. To treat a person as an unbeliever could include removal from leadership and teaching, revoking membership, and taking away privileges.[76] Yet it is important that the church continue to evangelize to this person and gently attempt to nudge them toward Christ.[77]

Michael Hare recommends a slow approach to conflict, because rushed responses often make the situation worse.[78] Hare has produced a method of conflict management that requires time, analysis, and communication. After it is apparent that conflict has

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[73] Sande, *The Peacemaker,* 187.

[74] Sande, *The Peacemaker,* 192.

[75] Sande, *The Peacemaker,* 193.

[76] Sande, *The Peacemaker,* 194.

[77] Sande, *The Peacemaker,* 194.

[78] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 43.

happened, it is important to the resolution process to map out the situation. The first step is to understand the presenting issues, determine the conflict level, and then state the rationale for that named conflict level.[79] This analytical approach to conflict helps people disengage their visceral response to conflict and gives way for the brain to think critically to find the best strategy to address the situation.

After the conflict has been mapped out, a holistic intervention strategy can be selected.[80] Intrapersonal conflict often requires one-on-one attention from a counselor, coach, trainer, or discipleship leader. Discipleship groups can also provide the opportunity for people to address their intrapersonal conflict.[81] Hare, similar to Sande, recommends the Matthew 18 strategy that includes negotiation, mediation, and arbitration when conflict is at the interpersonal level. The best strategy for both intragroup and intergroup conflict is problem-solving sessions facilitated by a leader and conducted in a way that meets the needs of that particular group size and dynamic.[82] Structural conflict requires the organizational leaders to come together and make systemic and organizational decisions to address the conflict. Often an outside coach or consultant is beneficial at this level.[83]

Leonard Sweet is a distinguished professor, author, and speaker. His method of conflict management unfolds at the table. One of the best ways to work out relational

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[79] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 53.

[80] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 47.

[81] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 65.

[82] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 65.

[83] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 65.

issues, problems, and conflicts, he claims, is to bring it to the table.[84] Physically, food

helps control mood and irritability by maintaining proper sugar levels.[85] The table also

provides silence—silence that mends brokenness, gives way to truth, and creates the

space for creativity to overflow.[86] Sweet writes, "The secret of a loving, forgiving church

is to commune before you argue. In feeding you, I forgive you."[87] The table is surrounded

by people—it is a family setting, whereas the Matthew 18 approach is considered a

private strategy between two people. At the where conflict begins to be resolved there is

support of fellow believers and forgiveness is given and received.

One of the major themes of these different methods of conflict management is

communication. Communication is not a one-way street, but an interchange between the

people involved. It is to give and receive important information with honesty, love, and

truth. If local congregations desire a healthy response to conflict, they have to engage in

clear and honest communication regardless of the conflict management method chosen,

even if it is uncomfortable. If communication shuts down or breaks down, a healthy

resolution will be difficult to find.

Elements for Healthy Conflict Management

In the midst of conflict, there are several key elements to remember to help create

healthy outcomes. These elements can help steer people to make choices that bring

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[84] Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet To Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO; NavPress, 2014), 83.

[85] Sweet, *From Tablet To Table,* 124.

[86] Sweet, *From Tablet To Table,* 126-127.

[87] Sweet, *From Tablet To Table,* 125.

resolution instead of ignoring unresolved conflict. If these key elements are forgotten, it can lead toward negativity and promote hurtful and unhealthy conflict management methods.

First, conflict does not measure the health of a congregation. "Churches will have conflict even if they are the most productive, Spirit-filled, and biblical churches in the world."[88] There will be conflict when the church is in green pastures, on the mountaintop, or in the valley of the shadow of death. Conflict does not always equate to dysfunction, questionable leadership, or spiritual carnality. Church leadership cannot assume their church congregation is unhealthy based on conflict.

Another key element to healthy conflict resolution is to maintain proper focus. Throughout the conflict resolution process, it can become easy to focus on the conflict itself. The congregation needs to turn their attention to where God is abundantly at work in the life of the church. There may be conflict that is difficult to work through, but God is still present and at work in church. Tara Klena Barthel is the Director at the Institute for Christian Conciliation and David Edling is the Director of Church Relations at Peacemaker Ministries. Both have served local congregations to assist in conflict management. They coauthored *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care* and in this book write,

> As our focus shifts away from our church's conflicts and toward what God is doing, and we can celebrate his work in our church, our fearful hearts will be quieted and our propensity to run away or attack will be lessened. If even one or two other people in our church likewise experience this reorientation of focus and perspective we can be united around a common vision, passion, and mission—the glory of God.[89]

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[88] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 49.

[89] Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts,* 10.

When the congregation sees and knows that God is still at work, it unites the people of God so they can move forward to bring glory to God. To help keep a positive perspective and not get discouraged, the congregation needs to take note of the presence of God in the local church.

Not only should the congregation maintain proper focus but also the correct perspective. Barthel and Edling suggest that a key element to healthy conflict management is to maintain an eternal perspective.[90] "The right worship of God and a focus on eternity as a present reality and future hope will help us overcome our fears and doubts."[91] Congregations have to overcome fear and doubt if they want to experience conflict resolution that brings growth and unity to relationships. If an enteral perspective is maintained throughout the conflict, then hope can blossom. An eternal perspective is maintained through worship, praise, and prayer.

Hare writes, "The problem is that our natural responses often feel so right in the moment that we rush in where angels fear to tread."[92] A congregation that remembers that conflict does not measure church health, maintains focus on God's work in the life of the church, and keeps an eternal perspective through worship, praise, and prayer will be able to work through conflict in ways that bring positive outcomes through conflict management processes. These key elements help keep the hearts and minds of the people involved positive and in tune with the heart of God so that they can push away their

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[90] Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts,* 25.

[91] Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts,* 25.

[92] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 44.

natural responses to conflict and respond in a way that brings unity, growth, and maturity to the relationships.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a foundational theology for the Christian church. A trademark of Christianity is that Jesus Christ sacrificed himself on the cross so that humans, the children of God, could experience forgiveness for their sins. Forgiveness is an essential part of conflict resolution.

Christians claim their identity as forgiven children of God. "The overwhelming reality of God's eternal forgiveness of each of our personal sins should result in an overwhelming desire to forgive others their sins against us."[93] Since the church is a collection of forgiven people, they should also be a people that are quick to forgive others. God's forgiveness overflows so that the people of God can forgive, not by their own strength, but through God's strength.[94]

Forgiveness is not an emotion or a feeling. Rather, forgiveness is a choice. Ken Sande writes that forgiveness can be broken down into four decisions:

"I will not dwell on this incident."
"I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."
"I will not talk to others about this incident."
"I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship."[95]

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[93] Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts,* 167.

[94] Sande, *The Peacemaker,* 205.

[95] Sande, *The Peacemaker,* 209.

Essentially, forgiveness is a commitment to not let the conflict or the hurt spiral deeper and deeper. These promises deconstruct walls that prevent relationships from developing, pulling people together instead of pushing apart.

Forgiveness is a wonderful part of conflict resolution, but it is only one step in the process.[96] Conflict does not end with forgiveness. Apologies cannot just be exchanged and then the conflict is over. Peacemaker Ministries created a pledge called "A Commitment to Biblical Conflict Resolution." Below is an excerpt from the pledge:

> Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.[97]

Forgiveness shows that the church values people and relationships and it paves a path for healthy conflict resolution. Conflict without forgiveness is less likely to be resolved in ways that preserve relationship and result in positive outcomes for everyone involved. When forgiveness is the first step of conflict resolution people are able to creatively work together to find solutions to conflict because they have let go of their anger, negativity, and resentment. Forgiveness does not mean the conflict is over. It is an important step toward resolution, but there is much more work to be done.

Conclusion

Conflict is a natural and expected part of church life. Congregations will experience conflict, but it does not have to be divisive and disrupt the unity of the body of

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[96] Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts,* 168.

[97] "A Commitment to Biblical Conflict Resolution," Peacemaker Ministries, April 2018, https://peacemaker.training/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/peacemakers-pledge-sm.pdf.

Christ. "During any church conflict, we simply strive to become who and what we already are: one in Christ. We may differ over issues and hold conflicting positions on important questions, but those temporary things pale in comparison to our unity in Christ."[98] Throughout conflict, the priority of the church should be unity.

Conflict can erupt into a firestorm that has the potential to overcome and destroy a church,[99] but that does not have to be the result. The church can maintain its unity and work through the conflict when the congregation responds to it in healthy ways. The church's response to conflict is a choice. They can respond instinctually with avoidance, or passive or aggressive tendencies that are dishonest and harmful and which, in turn, lead to unresolved conflict. Or the church can respond to conflict with forgiveness and truthful communication that flows from love and opens the doors to congregational growth, maturity in relationships, and unity. Healthy conflict management methods have the potential to bring great joy, empowerment, and fulfillment to the body of Christ.[100]

This chapter explored the thoughts, practices, and beliefs of experts in the field of church conflict. The church is not a business, but the church is a workplace for the congregation. The next chapter will study conflict in the business and corporate world and examine what workplace research can teach the church about conflict resolution.

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[98] Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts,* 173.

[99] Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 11, Kindle.

[100] Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, 47.

CHAPTER 3:

CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

In the previous chapter, conflict was examined as a byproduct of relationships. Businesses are made up of people in working relationships, so conflict will exist there as well. In the world of business, managers spend between 25 and 40 percent of their work time dealing with conflict.[1] In 2008, CPP Global, the creators of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, did a study on workplace conflict, which revealed that employees in the United States spent an average of 2.8 hours per week handling workplace conflict. Over $350 billion in hourly wages in 2008 was spent on employees working through conflict.[2] Resources, time, money, and emotional energy are continually spent on conflict.

According to Carsten De Dreu, a professor of psychology and behavior economics in the Netherlands, and Laurie Weingart, a professor of organizational behavior and theory, all conflict falls into two categories: relational conflict and task conflict. Relational conflict is the type of conflict that occurs due to personal preference, opinion, style, or taste. Task conflict is centered on policy, procedures, how resources should be used and distributed, and what judgments should be made with the information that is given.[3] This chapter will look at the research done on conflict in the workplace.

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[1] Zeynep Ilgaz, "Conflict Resolution: When Should Leaders Step In?" *Forbes*, May 15, 2014, https://www.forbes.com/sites/85broads/2014/05/15/conflict-resolution-when-should-leaders-step-in/.

[2] "Human Capital Report: Workplace Conflict and How Businesses Can Harness It To Thrive," *CPP Global*, July 2008, 2, https://shop.themyersbriggs.com/Pdfs/CPP_Global_Human_Capital_Report_Workplace_Conflict.pdf.

[3] Carsten K. De Dreu and Laurie R. Weingart, "Task versus Relationship Conflict, Team Performance, and Team Member Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88, no. 4 (2003): 741, http://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.4.741.

This can be used to show how congregations can learn to successfully resolve task conflict.

Conflict Management Strategies

Using the correct strategy of conflict management for a given situation is key to producing healthy outcomes in the workplace. Conflict management is defined as "designing effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness of an organization."[4] Conflict management is about working through conflict in constructive methods while also trying to prevent harm to those involved.[5]

There are numerous strategies for conflict management.[6] However, the same approach will not work in every situation. Each conflict has a character of its own and will need to be evaluated so that the right approach can be used for that particular circumstance. Everyone has their own default method of conflict management, but that one method will not always bring the best result.[7] The better an individual, especially a leader or manager, understands their own default strategy, the better they will know if that method is best for their conflict experiences. If the default method is inappropriate for a particular conflict, another strategy can then be chosen.

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[4] M. Afzalur Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations* (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 2001), 76.

[5] Alf H. Walle, "Resolving Conflict and Business Anthropology," *International Journal of Business Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (2018): 122, EBSCOhost.

[6] Carsten K. De Dreu, Arne Evers, Bianca Beersma, Esther S. Kluwer, and Aukje Nauta, "A Theory-Based Measure Of Conflict Management Strategies In The Workplace," *Journal Of Organizational Behavior* 22, no. 6 (September 2001): 646, http://doi.org/10.1002/job.107.

[7] CPP Global, "Human Capital Report," 31.

Maintaining healthy relationships in the workplace requires adequate conflict management strategies and techniques.[8] There are traditional methods of task conflict management that are found in business textbooks from the 1990s. There are also newer, more modern, strategies that attempt to simplify conflict management. Both traditional and modern strategies will be examined here.

Traditional Conflict Management Strategies

The traditional methods of conflict management are based on the Dual Concern Theory. This theory focuses on the tension between the concern for oneself and the concern for others in the midst of conflict. The Dual Concern Theory is about discovering the right amount of cooperation and assertiveness during the conflict process. The higher one's concern for others, the more cooperative one will be. The higher concern one has for one's self, the more assertiveness.[9] Kenneth Thomas uses Dual Concern Theory to develop his Two-Dimensional Taxonomy of Strategic Intentions and names five traditional strategies of conflict management that are on the scale between assertiveness and cooperativeness: compete, accommodate, compromise, collaborate, and avoid.[10] Figure 4 shows where these five strategies land on the scale between assertive and

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[8] Srđan Žikić, Aneta Marinović, and Igor Trandafilović, "Promotion of Conflict Management Strategies in Terms of Modern Business," *Megatrend Review* 9, no. 1 (2012): 202, EBSCOhost.

[9] De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, and Nauta, "A Theory-Based Measure Of Conflict Management Strategies In The Workplace," 646.

[10] Kenneth Thomas, "Conflict and Negotiation Process," in *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, ed. Marvin D. Dunnette and Leaetta M. Hough, 261-717 (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1992), 668.

cooperative.[11] Figure 5 reveals where these traditional conflict strategies are the spectrum

of concern for self and others.[12]
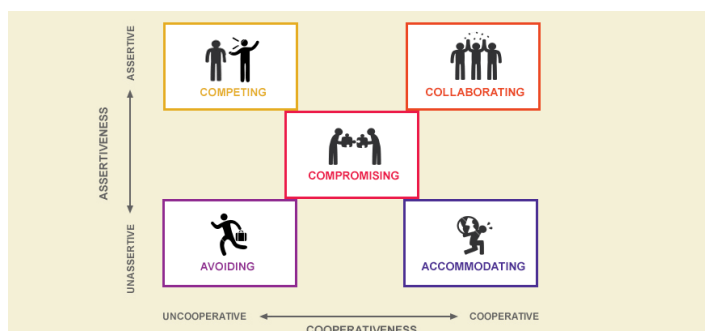
Figure 4: Assertiveness and Cooperativeness in Dual Concern Theory
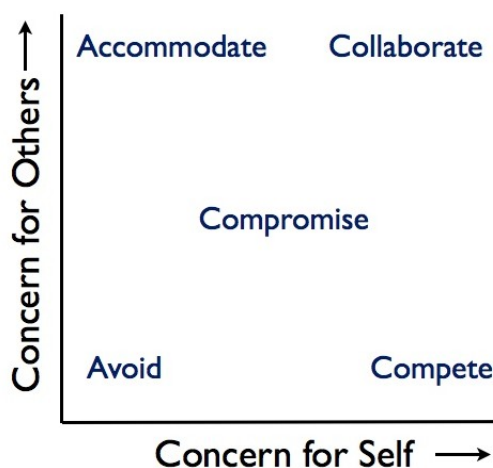
Figure 5: Concern for Others and Self in Dual Concern Theory

      The first conflict management style Thomas names is the compete method. This

method results in a win-lose outcome. Using this method, one party works to get their

own way at the cost of the other. They work to prove they are right and the other is

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[11] "Dual Concern Theory," Organizational Conflict, accessed November 13, 2020, https://conflictresolutionsolution.weebly.com/dual-concern-theory.html.

[12] Joey Cope, "Seven Commandments for Leaders Who Truly Lead," Duncan Center Solutions, Abilene Christian University, August 14, 2013, https://blogs.acu.edu/duncumcenter/2013/08/14/seven-commandments-for-leaders-who-truly-lead/#.X69NDZNKh_Q.

wrong.[13] The dominant party is not afraid to force their way. They are aggressively

assertive and not cooperative. This method is used when the outcome of a task cannot be

changed. For instance, a manager would use the compete method to resolve conflict when

one employee continues to miss work or show up late and causes the team to not

complete their marks for the day and lose income. For the manager, there is only one

solution that works to solve this conflict. Regardless of the employee's excuses, the

person will be fired.

Accommodate is the opposite method of compete. This is when one party puts

their needs below the other's in an attempt to satisfy the other party. The intent of this

method is to smooth over the conflict to prioritize the others involved at the cost of self,

and it requires self-sacrifice.[14] Accommodate is used in more relational conflict but is

important for task conflict as well. If a manager has an employee that is unable to work

the normal office hours of 9:00AM-5:00PM but has essential skills to complete the goals

of the workplace, the manager could accommodate the needs of that employee to achieve

the objective.

The third conventional method of conflict management given by Thomas is

compromise. This is a middle ground between compete and accommodate. This method

attempts to satisfy everyone involved in the conflict, but the outcome is still not the best

option for either party. This does not produce a win-win situation; it is splitting the

difference between the two parties.[15] When a team in the workplace has a project with

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[13] Thomas, "Conflict and Negotiation Process," 668.

[14] Thomas, "Conflict and Negotiation Process," 669.

[15] Thomas, "Conflict and Negotiation Process," 669.

many different parts, there will be times when compromise is necessary. When two employees are at a standoff on how to approach a problem within that project, compromise can pave the way for success if both people surrender a little so that the team can reach their goal.

Collaborate is a conflict management method that hopes to bring a win-win scenario where all parties are satisfied with the outcome of the conflict. This method is both assertive and cooperative. This method can also be called problem solving, integration, or synergy.[16] When team communication breakdowns have caused production to decrease because one employee prefers to communicate through text messages and the other through emails, the manager can hold a meeting to brainstorm ideas of how to communicate better. The team listens to the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of communication and agree that the best method for the team would be to create a Slack Channel. This solution creates a win-win outcome for everyone involved. Collaboration allows different opinions, goals, and tasks to work together for the good of the project.

The final method is to avoid the conflict. This method is the opposite of the collaborative method. Avoidance is not assertive or cooperative. Rather, the conflict is neglected and creates a lose-lose outcome. With this method all situations are ignored, and the conflict takes its own course without any attempts at resolution.[17] In a meeting, a manager could use avoidance with an employee who spent the entire time on the phone rather than contributing to the discussion because they knew that if they publicly

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[16] Thomas, "Conflict and Negotiation Process," 669.

[17] Thomas, "Conflict and Negotiation Process," 669.

addressed the issue, it would change the work environment and derail the goal of the meeting.

These five conflict management methods require people to look at the outcome of the conflict and ask, "What do I need the result of this conflict to be?" From there, managers can determine the best course of action when resolving conflict. The wrong conflict management method could completely derail the tasks and goals of the workplace.

Dual Concern Strategies Within Congregations

The Dual Concern Theory could be beneficial for congregations going through conflict. This theory reminds people of where their concerns should be and provides an opportunity for individuals to reflect on who the person is that they are in conflict with. It gives them space to ask, "Should I be concerned, should I care, for the person I am in conflict with?" This question should spark a reminder within congregational members that the person they are in conflict with is not the enemy but a child of God—Jesus' beloved. This theory also causes people to ask, "How much concern, or care, should I have for myself?" This is a reminder of the individual's own identity. It is important to find the line between selfishness and self-care. When it is determined how much concern and care there should be given for others and self, the appropriate strategy for conflict management can be chosen.

When conflict happens within the congregation, it can benefit church leaders to look at the possible results and examine the potential outcomes of the conflict. Once the outcome has been decided leaders can use the Dual Concern Theory to determine which conflict resolution is best. For example, if there can only be one specific outcome, then

the leaders would need to use the compete method. The Children's Director is in conflict with a congregational member who would like to volunteer to teach fifth and sixth grade Sunday School. The Children's Director did a background check and found that this person has been arrested for child abuse within the last five years and turned down the offer for this member to teach. The congregational member was upset, went to several other leaders to plead their case, and now wants to meet with the lead pastor to make their case. For the lead pastor and Children's Director, there can only be one outcome—the person cannot serve at this capacity. The competing method with a "win-lose" outcome will have to be used in this scenario. There are other situations where the outcome is not concrete, and the church leaders could use collaboration or compromise. Then there are times where the outcome is not important and leaders could use the Dual Concern Theory to select accommodation or avoidance. There is a time and a place for each of these five traditional strategies to be used when congregations enter task conflict.

Modern Strategy: Principled Negotiation

A modern strategy of conflict management is derived from the traditional strategy of negotiation. The Harvard Negotiation Project produced a new method of conflict management called principled negotiation.[18] There are four basic points to this method: people, interests, options, and criteria.[19] First, this method requires separating the people from the problem at hand. During the conflict process, it is easy to dehumanize the people on the other side of the conflict. It is vital to keep in mind the emotions and

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[18] Roger Fisher, William L. Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), chap. 1, Kindle.

[19] Fisher, Ury, and Patton, *Getting to Yes,* chap. 1.

feelings that everyone is experiencing. Second, it is important to not look at the different positions, but to focus on the interests of all parties. The third point challenges the people involved to create several options that bring mutual gains to everyone involved. The final point is criteria, and this is making sure that the result is based on an objective standard. The goal of this method is to efficiently produce outcomes that are wise and amicable.[20]

Principled negotiation is similar to collaboration from the Dual Concern's Theory of conflict management. Both seek to find a "win-win" outcome for everyone involved. With principled negotiation, leaders in the workplace must help employees understand other people's value as human beings and help them offer creative options, working for the success of those with whom they have conflict. A large business in the entertainment industry located in central California has over one thousand employees. When two people are in conflict, the Human Resources Department will have the employees take personality tests to help the two employees learn more about each other. The company believes that these personality tests will give insight into the other person, help them form a new perspective, and solve the conflict in ways that are beneficial to both parties.

Principled Negotiation values people and teamwork. The goal of this method is to help coworkers understand each other and work together to create options to successfully resolve the conflict within certain boundaries. Employers and managers who want to empower their workers and enable them to build relationships within their team will utilize this method for conflict resolution.

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[20] Fisher, Ury, and Patton, *Getting to Yes,* chap. 1.

Principled Negotiation Within Congregations

When church leaders need a "win-win" outcome for conflict, the process of principled negotiation can greatly help. At the beginning of conflict resolution, leaders can take a moment and remind the people who are involved that everyone, even the "opponent," is a child of God and made in the image of God. This helps remind all that their identity is not found in their sin, frustration, hurt, or conflict, but in God alone. This also puts everyone on a level playing field, because their identities are the same—child of God. This decreases the temptation to villainize or dehumanize others.

With the principled negotiation process, leaders challenge both parties to examine not only their needs and perspective, but also the needs and perspectives of others. It provides the opportunity for people to think outside themselves and challenges them to change how they frame the conflict. It moves from a "me verses you" mentality to "we are in this together!" It is through this sense of togetherness that the two congregational members can start to form new options to solve the conflict in wise and amicable ways.

Amy Gallo's Four Modern Strategies

Amy Gallo gives four different modern strategies to conflict management: do nothing, indirectly address, directly address, and make an exit.[21] To do nothing is not conflict avoidance, but a conscious choice a person makes to handle the conflict. There are times when managers must decide which conflicts have a high priority for resolution

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[21] Amy Gallo, *HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict,* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), chap. 2, Kindle.

and which ones need to be left alone. This is similar to the traditional methods of avoidance and accommodation in the Dual Concern Theory. The main difference between them is that avoidance creates a "lose-lose" outcome and accommodation creates a "win-lose" outcome, while doing nothing is more in the realm of "gladly taking one for the team." This method, when executed correctly, is done without any anger, disappointment, or resentment.

Indirectly addressing the conflict is another strategy in conflict management. This method involves using a manager, overseer, or another coworker to deal with the conflict or talking about the conflict without naming it. This method is valuable when there is the need to prevent embarrassment or humiliation and to protect someone's reputation.[22] It allows for a team to preserve their cohesiveness without building resentment, blame, or disapproval from other people.

Then next method by Gallo is to directly address the conflict. In this method, the conflict is explicitly explained to the other side, people actively listen to other perspectives, and then everyone works together for a solution to the conflict. This is an assertive method of conflict management, which can backfire and escalate the conflict.[23] If people are not prepared to listen or learn a new perspective, then they will not be receptive to the direct approach because it requires openness to new viewpoints. Instead of bringing two sides of a conflict together it could end up pushing them farther apart.

The final strategy is to make permanent exit, which means to walk away from the conflict without addressing it to anyone but doing so without resentment or frustration.

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[22] Amy Gallo, *HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict,* chap. 2.

[23] Amy Gallo, *HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict,* chap. 2.

Both parties continue as though nothing happened. There are times when addressing the

conflict creates more risk than reward. This method is not conflict avoidance, but a

conscious decision to not address the situation. The downfall of this method is that the

conflict process could continue to grow more severe over time.[24] The last resort in

conflict management is to exit and get out of the situation. This includes being reassigned

to a different team, changing jobs, or laying off an employee. It does not have to mean

termination of employment, but it does mean ending the interaction of the parties that are

in conflict. This is an extreme method that can be time consuming and difficult,[25] but this

method could be what is best for everyone.

Gallo's Four Strategies Within Congregations

Gallo's four strategies are great options for pastors and leaders who are working

to resolve conflict. Pastors will need to prayerfully examine the situation and examine

possible outcomes to select which strategy is appropriate for each conflict, since do

nothing, indirectly address, directly address, and make an exit all have the potential for

both negative and positive outcomes.

A local church has decided that they needed to update the lights on the platform in

the sanctuary. The church would be investing a large amount of money in this upgrade

and asked the sound and media team to put together a proposal for the church board to

approve. After the team spoke with a nearby company about new lights, two members of

the team created their own proposals. A newer and younger member of the team

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[24] Amy Gallo, *HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict,* chap. 2.

[25] Amy Gallo, *HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict,* chap. 2.

proposed the church upgrade to LED bulbs. This would cost more up front but would save the church time and money in the future. The other proposal was from the team leader, who has been on this team for many years. He wanted to have traditional halogen lights that would have to be replaced every six months. Whenever the lights need changed, a lift had to be rented to reach the rafters in the sanctuary ceiling. These two men greatly disagreed over how to upgrade the sanctuary lights and the conflict started to escalate. The newer member of the team felt like he was not being heard or taken seriously. The team leader had invested a lot of time over the years to create his plan for the upgrade. When it came time to present the proposals to the church board, the only one that was presented was the traditional halogen lights and the church board approved it.

In this scenario, if the newest member of the team, who did not get his proposal taken to the church board, decided to do nothing as his conflict management strategy, he would continue to work on the team and support the upgrades without any grumbles or complaints. This method could easily become a silent killer for the team if resentment, bitterness, and hurt take root in the hearts of the people involved. On the opposite side, the possibility of doing nothing can bring a sense of freedom to the people involved. For the good of the congregation, there will be times when leadership will need to encourage people to release the conflict quietly and extend forgiveness without being asked.

The indirect approach in this conflict would be for the team leader to take this conflict to the lead pastor. Then the lead pastor could meet with the newest team member and help him work through the conflict, or the pastor could meet with the team as a whole to discuss the importance of teamwork in ministry. This method can save someone from the embarrassment and awkwardness that can come from conflict. However, the indirect

method could also make the situation worse and create bad outcomes. For instance, people could feel as though they were being gossiped about or as though they are a "problem" to be solved. This could lead to embarrassment, deeper hurt, and insecurity in the confidentiality of the leaders in the church.

If the people involved chose the direct strategy of conflict management, at the beginning everyone would sit down together, discuss their proposals with the team, hear explanations behind the proposals, and work to form a lighting proposal to take to the church board. If the proposal had already been accepted the team leader would meet with the newest member and a pastor to discuss why the proposal was accepted but to also listen to new ideas and be open to changes. The direct strategy would require the team to approach the conflict with honesty and an open mind. It challenges everyone to be equally invested to resolve the conflict. This strategy has the potential for everyone involved to be pleased with the final proposal, but on the opposite side, the direct approach could risk escalation and high emotional stress. The sides could become more divided and anger could increase.

For someone to make an exit as their conflict strategy in this scenario would mean for them to leave the sound and media team and find another place to serve within church or, in an extreme situation, find another church. This is a peaceful separation where it is best if certain people do not continue to work together for the better of the team and the ministry of the church. To make an exit would not be healthy if the newest member of the team left sound and media but grumbled and complained to everyone else in the congregation. If pastors and leaders use this as their default strategy for conflict management, then the church will slowly collapse.

Ilgaz's Three-Step Approach

Zeynep Ilgaz, the president and co-founder of Confirm BioSciences and TestCountry, offers a simple three-step approach to conflict management in the workplace. The first step is to diagnose the conflict taking place. Not only is this figuring out the type of conflict, but also determining the severity of the conflict. Collecting all of the information during the diagnosis step will lead to better conflict resolution. The second step is to identify the goals. In this step people, need to decide if they want a win-win outcome or not. Also, it is a time for the people involved to outline a plan to achieve the results desired. The third step, Ilgaz, states is for the people involved to focus on the opportunity their conflict has sparked. This offers them a chance to grow and learn through the conflict.[26] When people focus on the opportunity provided by conflict, it leads them to contemplate the positive effects of situation, which will help frame future conflicts in a positive light.

This three-step approach to conflict resolution will help allow pastors, leaders, and congregational members to stop taking an emotional approach to conflict. Rather, this approach challenges people to examine the conflict and gather as much information as possible. This takes time and logic, which allows emotions to settle and people to think clearly. Also, this method creates the opportunity to ask, "What do people hope to gain from this conflict?" or "Is the outcome subjective or concrete?" From this point, people can see how conflict has provided them with opportunity. Healthy handling of conflict now will affect future approaches to conflict.

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[26] Ilgaz, "Conflict Resolution: When Should Leaders Step In?"

Conflict Management Toolbox

When conflict happens in the workplace, the manager has a large toolbox to open and find the right instrument to use for managing the situation. There are many different tools to use: competing, accommodation, compromise, collaboration, or avoidance; principled negotiation, do nothing, indirectly address, directly address, or make an exit; or Ilgaz's three-step approach. But before a tool can be chosen, managers and supervisors have to think through the conflict, examine possible outcomes, determine the needed outcome, gather information, develop processes to move forward, and then select the conflict management strategy that fits.

The wrong strategy can have detrimental effects on employees. When conflict is mismanaged and the wrong strategy is used, it can cause production to drastically slow down, projects to be dropped, noncooperation, bullying, turnover, people absent from work, and termination of employment.[27] It can lead to stress and anxiety in the workplace and result in an unhealthy breakdown of work relationships, create poor opinions of coworkers, and alter the social climate of the office by creating tension and antagonism.[28] In extreme cases, mismanaged conflict can lead to violence and physical harm.[29]

A negative effect of mismanaged conflict can be anger caused by unresolved and persistent conflict. Anger can be accompanied with many health risks. "A Duke

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[27] Society for Human Resource Management, "Managing Workplace Conflict," accessed January 5, 2020, https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingworkplaceconflict.aspx.

[28] De Dreu and Weingart, "Task versus Relationship Conflict, Team Performance, and Team Member Satisfaction," 741.

[29] Carsten K. De Dreu, and Evert Van De Vliert, *Using Conflict in Organizations,* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 9, Ebook Central.

University Medical Center study showed that an intensely angry episode can lead to an eightfold increase in risk of heart attack and anger has been linked to strokes, irregular heartbeat, sleep problems, excess eating, and insulin resistance, which can help cause diabetes."[30] Mismanaged conflict can cause severe physical health issues, which leads to people missing work due to being unwell or to attend doctor appointments.

There are warning signs that a conflict strategy is not effective and there needs to be a change of strategy. One sign is when a person in the workplace starts changing their behavior, speaking tone, or their body language. It also becomes evident that conflict is negatively affecting the workplace when people unexpectedly miss a day at work, the workplace becomes more stressful, or when production starts to slow.[31] When these signals are recognized, it gives workplace leaders the opportunity to address conflict, change the strategy, and navigate toward better outcomes.

There are many positive effects of well-managed conflict. The major positive effect of conflict is creativity produced while resolving the conflict and afterward.[32] Conflict can act as a spark in the workplace and ignite ideas that never would have been created without it. When employees have to work through differences, understand difficult situations, intergrade ideas, problem solve, find solutions, clearly communicate, listen to others, and think critically, it becomes a birthplace to creativity and innovation. It is important that the right tool is selected for each and every conflict situation.

[30] Amy Gallo, *HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict,* chap. 2.

[31] Ilgaz, "Conflict Resolution: When Should Leaders Step In?"

[32] Cynthia B. Hanson, "Viewpoint: The Art and Science of Conflict Management," Society For Human Resource Management, August 7, 2018, https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/viewpoint-the-art-and-science-of-conflict-management.aspx.

Workplace Conflict Training

Most companies do little to train employees on how to navigate workplace

conflict. According to the CPP Global Human Capital Report, 57% of employees in the

United States have never had any form of conflict management.

> Where training does exist, it adds value: over 95% of people receiving training as
> a part of leadership development or on formal external courses say that it helped
> them in some way. Over a quarter (37%) say it made them more comfortable and
> confident in managing disputes and 58% of those who have been trained say they
> now look for win-win outcomes for conflict.[33]

Conflict is an issue that every person deals with. Training on diversity, communication,

cross-functional job awareness, conflict management skills, and listening skills will be

beneficial to successful conflict management.[34]

Ellen Raider and Susan Coleman developed the Coleman Raider Workshop as a

training opportunity to help workplace conflict resolution. This workshop consists of

seven modules over the course of three days.[35] The content of these modules includes an

overview of conflict, conflict resolution methods, the effect of cultural differences,

emotions, and mediation. Each training workshop is customized with simulations are that

pertinent to the needs of each workplace.[36]

Raider and Coleman offer insight into this workshop after years of experience.

First, each person approaches conflict in their own method that has been formed by many

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[33] CPP Global, "Human Capital Report," 3.

[34] Neil H. Katz and Linda T. Flynn, "Understanding Conflict Management Systems and Strategies in the Workplace: A Pilot Study," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2013): 405, http://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21070.

[35] Peter T. Coleman, Morton Deutsch, and Eric C. Marcus, *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2014), 851, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[36] Coleman, Deutsch, and Marcus, *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, 851.

different factors, such as life experience and skillsets. Conflict training needs to include time to challenge and support the trainees' preferred, or instinctual, method of conflict management.[37] Another insight into conflict training was the need for participatory and interactive activities, like roleplay, followed by a public debrief. It is also beneficial to video roleplay so that the people in the training can watch and reflect on it afterward.[38] Raider and Coleman believe that there needs to be support and follow-up after the three-day training. In the postscript of the book *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice,* they write:

> As we have grown as practitioners who have delivered this training over many years, we have come to conclusion that while this training is very powerful, it is generally insufficient when it comes to systemic change. When conflict resolution was emerging as a popular topic in the 1980s, training was the intervention of choice for both clients and practitioners. When there was tension, difficulty, or conflict, both practitioners and clients chose conflict resolution training. It was always helpful but not the tool that could ultimately make a systemic impact given its focus on the individual. Human behavior is a function of the person and the environment, and unfortunately training often focuses only on building capacity at the individual and interpersonal levels. As a result, when participants return to work, they may not feel that the climate or context adequately supports them to practice their new awareness and skills. The danger is that participants will we revert to their old behaviors.[39]

The three-day workshop is a great start to healthy conflict management, but more is needed. Once out of training and back to a normal work routine, most people will revert to their previous behaviors and natural responses to conflict.

Heather Babaryk has worked in Human Resources for over fourteen years and is currently a Human Resources Manager at a company with over 46,000 employees in the

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[37] Coleman, Deutsch, and Marcus, *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, 850.

[38] Coleman, Deutsch, and Marcus, *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, 850.

[39] Coleman, Deutsch, and Marcus, *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, 871.

United States and even more internationally. Her workplace offers different levels of contact training that correlate with the various levels of leadership. The highest level of leaders in management receive one-on-one coaching on conflict resolution. Managers below this level receive group coaching through an outside consultant as a two-year course. First-level managers attend a training course of six months. In this course, the participants will meet for two days, return to the workplace to put into practice what they learned for three to four weeks, and repeat the process until the six-month end date. This allows the participants to reflect, debrief, and gain experience while having support during training. In this training, the managers are given a conversation guide that helps prepare them for conflict. Managers can use these conversation guides when they know they are about to have a meeting centered around conflict. This guide helps managers think through their outcomes, goals, and needs and it gives the agenda for the conversation.[40]

Barbaryk has found this training beneficial if people are open-minded and will take it seriously. Fear of lawsuits, a desire to grow the company, and career advancement are main motivators for people to do well in these conflict training opportunities. Over the years, she has received positive feedback from the employees about the conflict training and the conversation planner. When Barbaryk joined this large business ten years ago, it was normal for conflict to escalate and result in yelling among the high-ranking managers. After this multi-level conflict training was implemented, there has been a significant difference in how conflict is handled in the office.[41]

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[40] Heather Barbaryk, interviewed with Christina McCully on November 11, 2020.

[41] Barbaryk, interviewed with Christina McCully on November 11, 2020.

Mary Scannel, who is contracted to do corporate training close to 100 times a year, created the book *The Big Book of Conflict Resolution Games* to give managers and employees different games and activities to help teach conflict resolution. She writes, "Games and activities create a safe environment for team members to experience real conflict—complete with emotions, assumptions, and communication challenges."[42] Through the created conflict in a game, the employees will apply what they learned in the game to real conflict in the workplace.[43] In a game, a team competes to achieve certain goals, but often people disagree about how those goals should be achieved. Through the process, people will experience task conflict together, witness the reactions of other players, see how coworkers think through the conflict, resolve the conflict together, and succeed or lose together. When coworkers play together, they are given the experience and the tools needed to solve their next workplace conflict well.[44] A key to successful conflict training with games is a strong facilitator. This is the role a boss, supervisor, or manager should take on. The responsibilities of the facilitator are to encourage the employees; observe, redirect, and take breaks when needed for discussion; and debrief afterward.[45]

One game Scannel includes in her book is "Beach Ball Pass." In this game, a small group gathers in a circle. The facilitator will toss the ball into the middle and the team has to hit the ball double the amount of people in the group before it can touch the

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[42] Mary Scannel, *The Big Book of Conflict Resolution Games* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 1, https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2070/2016/08/The-big-book-of-Conflict-Resolution-Games.pdf.

[43] Scannel, *The Big Book of Conflict Resolution Games*, 1.

[44] Scannel, *The Big Book of Conflict Resolution Games*, 2.

[45] Scannel, *The Big Book of Conflict Resolution Games*, 6.

ground. The same player is not allowed to hit the ball twice in a row and two people cannot dominate. The objective of this game is to have the team work through the conflict while they attempt to complete the goal and come together in a positive manner to create a plan. Afterward, the small group will debrief with discussion questions posed by the facilitator.

This method of conflict management is playful, interactive, and engaging. This is similar to the roleplay that used in the Coleman Raider Workshop. Instead of the employees acting out and discussing imaginary conflict, they are working through the conflict that the game created. The advantage of the game approach to training is that it can go deeper. Rules can be added to the games to make them more challenging. If a particular small group does not have conflict in one of the games, the facilitator can add new rules quickly. The games require everyone to participate, which can be an advantage and disadvantage. The advantage is that people have to put down their phones and focus on the task at hand or the entire team suffers. The disadvantage is that it can put people on the spot or embarrass them if they fail at an activity.

Simone Condreay is the Director of Operations at a Chick-Fil-A restaurant in Santa Maria, CA. The majority of the employees that work at this Chick-Fil-A are under the age of 25. Her mission is to teach her young staff how to deal with conflict. She mentors her team members when conflict arises in the workplace. She does roleplay conversations with her workers to help them learn how to navigate difficult and uncomfortable conversations. She also acts as a mediator when required. Mentorship has helped create a better work environment and positive reactions to conflict.[46]

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[46] Simone Condreay, interviewed by Christina McCully, November 28, 2018.

Conflict training is not a one-time event, but a continual process. Through the above approaches to conflict training, it becomes evident that the most effective training will include pieces of them all: workshops, coaching, courses, interactive games, and mentorship. All of these approaches take time and clear objectives. Businesses and corporations that want their employees to deal with conflict in healthy way will need to take intentional steps to create a conflict training method that works best for them and their employees.

Conflict Training in Local Churches

If managers and employees find conflict training helpful in the workplace, it can be helpful in churches as well. There are many different ministries that offer conflict assistance, training, and tips. One example is Crossroads Resolution Group. Congregations are not franchises, but an expression of the body of Christ, and each expression has its own DNA. Christian author and contributor to *Christianity Today* Kevin Ford writes, "Healthy churches have a clear sense of identity. They know their code. And they don't readily deviate from it. That code gives a church a sense of collective personality and uniqueness; it defines each fellowship as one of a kind. Churches must work at keeping their operating culture in alignment with their code."[47] If God created each church to have its own DNA, conflict training that has been created for a broad spectrum of churches will not exactly fit every congregation's needs or

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[47] Kevin G. Ford, "Leader's Insight: Your Church's DNA," Christianity Today, July 23, 2007, https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2007/july-online-only/cln70723.html.

personality, just as the Coleman Raider Workshop is best done when customized for the specific needs of particular businesses.

Since conflict training is needed in the church, the best practice would be for the training to come from within the congregation, which allows it to reflect the DNA of that particular group of people. For example, if a church already has created a culture of forgiveness and it is preached regularly, then conflict training can spend less time focusing on forgiveness and more time on clear communication or active listening. A team could be created from the congregation and pastoral staff which would be responsible to create conflict training guidelines and methods of training. It would need to comprise people who are trustworthy, wise, and who have a history of constructive conflict management. This team would need to understand the core values and foundations of the local church so they can discover when it is appropriate to use the different methods of conflict resolution. If a church's core value is family and there is conflict over children being in the sanctuary during worship rather than being placed in a separated ministry, then collaboration or negotiation are not possible and a win-lose method will need to be utilized. But if there is a conflict over a loud toddler in the sanctuary during a sermon while the nursery is available, collaboration could be used.

One responsibility of this team would be to look at the history of known conflicts in the church and name solvable, unsolvable, and perpetual conflicts. Once these are known, trainings can take place to help break the patterns of perpetual conflict and help people learn to live with unsolvable conflict. If the worship pastor starts the worship service ten minutes late every week and resentment has become evident between the laity and the pastoral staff, together the team can address the conflict and think creatively on

ways to solve it. Or, if a congregation has experienced unsolvable conflict, like the noise from children's church in the basement echoing in the sanctuary during the sermon, the team can walk with the church and pastors through the conflict, offering grace, mercy, and encouragement.

There are endless possibilities in ways the pastor and team could incorporate conflict training, but it must be a priority and done regularly. This team would work with the church through their conflict, develop training seminars, workshops, or one-on-one mentoring and coaching, setting the example of healthy conflict management for the congregation. Pastors could train potential ministry leaders on healthy conflict resolution before they are given a place to serve and continue with coaching and mentoring through their ministry. Small group leaders could disguise conflict training as ice breakers before small groups meetings and discreetly teach them how to handle conflict. The lead pastor could plan brief workshops, design roleplay learning options, or provide conversation guides around a topic of conflict that could arise in the church. This would give the church board a cohesive response to any issue congregants would have to the decisions that came from board meeting.

This method of training would reflect the DNA of this particular, unique expression of the body of Christ. This organic approach will help the conflict training be more easily accepted and practiced by the congregation. Churches that implement the business models of conflict training, make training a priority, and use creativity to empower and enable unity in the midst of difficult conflict.

Three Main Applications for Churches

Through the workplace conflict research, there are three main applications for the church. First, all of the workplace strategies take time: time to gather information, time to think through goals, time to evaluate options, and time to select the best strategy for conflict resolution. It takes time to effectively resolve conflict. Most conflict does not have to be resolved immediately. When there is conflict, church leaders need to slow down and take the time needed to resolve the conflict well. When conflict is rushed, it paves the way for mistakes, miscommunication, and hurt. Conflict does not need to be resolved in the foyer twenty minutes before worship services begins, in the parking lot after the midweek prayer, or in the middle of a heated meeting. A good practice is for leaders and pastors to learn the art of the pause and take their time to pray, think, reflect, and plan.

The second main application from workplace conflict to congregational conflict is to remember the goals. In task conflict, managers and supervisors always evaluate the goals and then the conflict is resolved in strategies that fulfill those goals. A great practice for church leaders and pastors would be to remind people of the goals, or the vision and mission, of the church before they engage in conversation about conflict. The mission and vision of the church can help navigate the outcome of the conflict. If a certain outcome does not fulfill or honor the church's mission and vision, then another strategy needs to be used.

The final main application from this research is that conflict training works. Successful businesses acknowledge conflict and train people for how to handle it to make the workplace better. There is huge potential for growth in the church if leaders would

prioritize conflict resolution training. Through training, leaders and congregational members can learn how to resolve conflict in ways that do not destroy church unity. Churches need to find ways to train through workshops, coaching, and mentoring.

"When and Where" Verses "Here and Now"

It would be optimal for church leaders to study businesses and corporations to learn skills on how to navigate task conflict. These strategies used for conflict management can be applied in the church. The Dual Concern Theory, principled negotiation, Amy Gallo's four strategies, and Ilgaz's three-step approach all require managers to gather information, examine the options, and determine the outcome that is needed.

Each strategy comes with its own risk. Some can escalate the conflict and result in negative and damaging outcomes. It is crucial for there to be training opportunities to help managers learn how to correctly navigate conflict and select the best strategy. Training that incorporates workshops, courses, coaching, and mentoring are especially effective in changing the climate of the workplace for successful conflict management.

Conflict training and conflict strategies are effective for "when and where" conflict, when there is time to plan for the future. These strategies and trainings are excellent for when management can plan the date for when and where the conversation happens. For instance, an employee approaches their manager about a situation his team has encountered while creating a new marketing strategy for one of their clients. Part of the team believes that their primary marketing should be done through social media to find younger buyers. The other members of the team believe that it is best to continue ads in magazines to attract their current buyers. The employee tells the manager that the

argument has gotten heated and one member of the team stormed out of the conference room. The manager has time to gather information, determine the goal for the team, and plan a scheduled meeting with the team the next day. There are great advantages to time and preparedness in workplace conflict. Leaders and employees need to use this time wisely for successful conflict resolution.

Not all conflicts have the time these strategies call for; some need to be addressed "here and now." A manager or a restaurant walks into the kitchen to find the chef and sous chef in a heated debate over how to properly cook one of the dishes on the menu for the evening. The manager does not have time to collect information, research recipes, or plan a meeting to come up with new options in the future. Customers have arrived and dinner needs to be prepared. The manager needs to resolve the conflict "here and now." The workplace strategies do not necessarily give the tools for immediate conflict resolution. To learn more about "here and now" conflict, the next chapter will examine relational conflict through the lens of marriage.

CHAPTER 4:

CONFLICT IN MARRIAGES

The previous chapter looked at workplace research to study resolution strategies for task conflict. This chapter will examine marriage research to learn about relational conflict. Every marriage, whether the couple is satisfied or dissatisfied, healthy or unhealthy, function or dysfunctional, deals with conflict. When two people engage in a close relationship, conflict becomes inevitable.[1] Conflict is a natural occurrence and cannot be prevented.[2] Every married couple deals with disagreements and negative emotions such as fear, mistrust, anger, and sadness.[3] Relationship health is not measured by how often people encounter conflict, but in how they respond to it.[4]

In the United States, 48.2 percent of the population over the age of 15 are married.[5] There are over 1 million divorces filed every year in the United States.[6] Numerous studies have been done on marriage satisfaction and conflict management to

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[1] Richard A. Mackey, Matthew A. Diemer, and Bernard A. O'Brien, "Conflict-Management Styles of Spouses in Lasting Marriages," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 37, no. 2 (2000): 134, https://doi.org/10.1037/h0087735.

[2] Linda Wilkinson, "Consensus Model Training For Couples: An Outcome Study Of An Integrated Conflict Management Program For Marriage Enrichment" (PhD diss., University of Colorado, Boulder, 1983), 33, https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Ascds%3AUS%3Aa0f9485f-df63-409f-a562-3c9094eda809.

[3] Howard Markman, "Constructive Marital Conflict Is Not an Oxymoron," *Behavioral Assessment* 13, no. 1 (1991): 91.

[4] Kristina M. Scharp and Timothy Curran, "Caregiving When There Is Family Conflict and Estrangement," *Generations* 42, no. 3 (2018): 51, EBSCOhost.

[5] Grant Suneson, "These States Have the Highest and Lowest Percentage of Married People in the US," USA Today, March 7, 2019, https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/03/07/marriage-us-states-highest-percentage-married-people/39043233/.

[6] Suneson, "These States Have the Highest and Lowest Percentage of Married People in the US."

help bring answers and resolve the high divorce rate amongst American couples. This chapter will explore the causes and types of marriage conflict, deconstructive conflict management methods and their negative effects, and constructive conflict management methods and their positive effects. The purpose of this chapter is to discover conflict management skills used for marriages that could be applied to church conflict.

Types of Conflict in Marriages

Dr. John Gottman is a leading expert on relationships and is a professor at the University of Washington. Through his research he has narrowed marriage conflict to two types: solvable and unsolvable.[7] Solvable conflicts are a one-time occurrence. They do not have emotional and painful baggage and are often situational conflict.[8] An example of a solvable conflict is one where the husband has the chore of washing the dishes every night. With a large work project, he has had to work long hours at the office and work in the evenings from his home office. The wife has become more and more frustrated that the sink is always full and smells up the kitchen. This conflict could be solved by reassigning the family chores during this work project, putting reminders on the refrigerator to wash the dishes, or hiring someone to come and clean during the busy periods. However, if solvable conflicts are not addressed and managed, they can quickly turn into perpetual conflicts.[9]

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[7] John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Harmony Books, 2015), 137.

[8] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 142.

[9] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work,* 143.

Unsolvable conflicts are perpetual conflicts that will be present between the couple throughout the duration of a marriage. Sixty percent of conflicts between married couples are perpetual.[10] These conflicts cannot be solved, but rather they must be managed. An example of an unsolvable conflict in a marriage would be a couple that disagrees about finances. The wife values generosity when it comes to money and prefers to give large tips and make donations to charities. The husband wants to save and conserve their money. Each person has their own backstory that has created their spending habits and neither person is going to suddenly change. Perpetual conflict must be acknowledged and discussed to prevent it from becoming overwhelming in the marriage. A marriage can still experience satisfaction, thrive, and be healthy while managing perpetual conflict.[11]

Types of Conflict Within the Church

There are conflicts within the church that through prayer, time, and the right conflict management strategy are solvable. One example of solvable conflict is when the ushers are frustrated because on rainy Sunday mornings people's shoes leave the foyer covered in water, which causes the floors to become slippery. The ushers grumble and complain when visitors walk through the door. When the janitor heard about the conflict, he added large mats to the floor when the forecast called for rain.

There are also unsolvable conflicts. An example of perpetual conflict is different philosophies of ministry between the youth pastor and the parents. The youth pastor

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[10] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work,* 136.

[11] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 139.

believes that youth group should be outreach-focused and has invited students who smoke, swear, and are often labeled "troublemakers." The parents believe that the primary focus of youth ministry should be discipleship and worship for the students within the congregation. The parents are often frustrated because of the "troublemakers" who attend youth group and the youth pastor is frustrated because it feels as though the students do not accept newcomers. The pastor and the parents are committed to the church and will not step down. In this situation, the conflict cannot be solved, so the people involved must maintain healthy relationships in the midst of continual conflict with love, grace, acceptance, and mercy without bitterness, resentment, or tension.

Awareness and acceptance of these two types of conflict is essential for church leaders. If it is a solvable conflict, leaders can follow conflict strategies to find resolution. If it is perpetual, then the leaders can help congregation members find ways to cope. Perpetual conflict requires the church family to choose to love each other despite their differences, opinions, personalities, or preferences.

Conflict Management

When there is conflict in a marriage, the couple must determine if it is solvable or unsolvable. From there the couple can determine the best possible method of conflict management.[12] Every person has a preferred style of conflict management they learned in adolescence. Personality, behavior, and methods of communication experienced affect how each person adapts their conflict management style, which is often adjusted to the

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[12] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 137.

situation at hand.[13] The type of conflict management style used is also dependent on the couple's communication skills and their psychological intimacy.[14] Professional psychologists Abraham P. Greeff and Tanya De Bruyne from South Africa divide marriage conflict management into two categories: destructive and constructive.[15]

Deconstructive Conflict Management

Destructive conflict management methods and responses are those that do not produce healthy and functional results to the conflict. Instead of building each other up, destructive methods tear each other down causing hurt and escalating the problem at hand. Destructive conflict management styles are methods that undermine the marriage relationship.[16] They cause spouses to be painfully direct and competitive with each other.[17] Signs that the conflict management method is destructive is when there is manipulation, inflexibility, rigidity, retaliation, threats, coercion, dominance, subordination, competitive attitudes, and demeaning communication.[18] The most common types of conflict management methods that break down the marriage relationship are dominance, accommodation, and avoidance.

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[13] Abraham P. Greeff and Tanya De Bruyne, "Conflict Management Style and Marital Satisfaction," *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 26, no. 4 (2000): 321, https://doi.org/10.1080/009262300438724.

[14] Mackey, Diemer and O'Brien, "Conflict-Management Styles of Spouses in Lasting Marriages," 144.

[15] Greeff and De Bruyne, "Conflict Management Style and Marital Satisfaction," 322.

[16] Mackey, Diemer and O'Brien, "Conflict-Management Styles of Spouses in Lasting Marriages," 136.

[17] Heather E. Canary and Daniel J. Canary, *Family Conflict*: *Key Themes in Family Communication* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 2013), 30.

[18] Greeff and De Bruyne, "Conflict Management Style and Marital Satisfaction," 322.

A couple in their first year of marriage decided that they wanted to save money to buy a house. While they put money aside every month, they could not agree on the home they wanted to buy. The husband wanted a home with lots of land and the wife wanted to live in a subdivision near town. Every time they looked at houses online, the tension would build in the room until someone slammed the computer shut and walked away. After five years of marriage, they were ready to purchase their home. The wife made an appointment with a realtor and mentioned that she only wanted to look at houses in subdivisions. At the appointment with the realtor, the husband was confused as to why they were not shown homes out in the country with land. When he asked his wife, she said, "I make the most money in this relationship and I changed my spending habits the most so we could afford this. We will buy the house I want!" Because the husband was humiliated and hurt from this conflict, he would default to accommodate his wife in conflict or avoid it completely.

Strategies of Deconstructive Conflict Management

Dominance, accommodation, and avoidance are three destructive conflict management strategies in marriage that are similar to ones named in the previous chapter on workplace conflict. When used to solve task conflict in the workplace, they can result in positive outcomes, but they are destructive when applied to relational conflict. Dominance is similar to the compete strategy, with a high concern for one spouse and low concern for the other. This method leads to superiority and coercion in the

relationship because one will be the victor while the other is the loser.[19] Dominance takes

away the partnership aspect of a marriage because one person's needs, feelings, and

desires will be ignored and will be forced to adjust to meet the needs, feelings, and

desires of the other. Accommodation is the conflict management strategy used to appease

the other person. The goal is peace, but that is achieved through sacrifice and creates a

lose-win result.[20] The avoidance strategy is used when the couple essentially ignores their

marriage relationship and reveals that the people in the relationship have a low concern

for themselves, a low concern for their spouse, and a low concern for their marriage,

creating a lose-lose situation for both spouses. In a marriage between a husband and a

wife, it is usually the man that uses avoidance to cope with conflict.[21] Using avoidance

helps men to maintain autonomy[22] and not be overrun by emotions.

Essentially, anything that harms the marriage relationship is deconstructive. When

one person is put in a place of superiority in the relationship it causes the conflict to

resolve in a way that empowers one and dismisses the other. Marriages can get caught in

a cycle of destructive conflict that will ultimately destroy the relationship between two

spouses.

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[19] Liat Kulik, Walfisch Shulamith, and Gabriel Liberman, "Spousal Conflict Resolution Strategies and Marital Relations in Late Adulthood," *Personal Relationships* 23, no. 3 (2016): 457, https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12137.

[20] Greeff and De Bruyne, "Conflict Management Style and Marital Satisfaction," 323.

[21] Kulik, Shulamith, and Liberman, "Spousal Conflict Resolution Strategies and Marital Relations in Late Adulthood," 457.

[22] Kulik, Shulamith, and Liberman, "Spousal Conflict Resolution Strategies and Marital Relations in Late Adulthood," 457.

Solvable Constructive Conflict Management

Conflict does not have to result in negativity, hurt, or harm, but can be managed in ways that build and support a healthy marriage. The opposite of deconstructive conflict management is constructive conflict management. This is any behavior that repairs the marriage relationship.[23] These methods are flexible and cooperative. They have the intent to learn and grow rather than preserve the past. They can build self-esteem within the couple and focus on the unity of the couple rather than the individuals.[24]

Strategies for Solvable Constructive Conflict Management

Collaboration and negotiation are constructive conflict management strategies in the workplace, as discussed in chapter three, and they are also used in marriages. With collaboration, the couple works together to confront a disagreement or problem with the best intent for both spouses. There is a high concern for both the husband and for the wife.[25] When using this method, everyone's behavior is cooperative and assertive.[26] Collaboration is when a couple makes the choice to work together to contribute toward a common goal that meets the needs of both people. This causes the couple to align themselves with each other.[27] A study done by the University of Stellenbosch in South

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[23] Mackey, Diemer, and O'Brien, "Conflict-Management Styles of Spouses in Lasting Marriages," 135.

[24] Greeff and De Bruyne, "Conflict Management Style and Marital Satisfaction," 322.

[25] Kulik, Shulamith, and Liberman, "Spousal Conflict Resolution Strategies and Marital Relations in Late Adulthood," 457.

[26] Greeff and De Bruyne, "Conflict Management Style and Marital Satisfaction," 323.

[27] Rebecca Mejía-Arauz et al., "Collaboration or Negotiation: Two Ways of Interacting Suggest How Shared Thinking Develops," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 23 (2018): 117, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.02.017.

Africa revealed that husbands and wives experience the most marital satisfaction and contentment with the outcomes when collaboration was used over any other conflict management method.[28] This method is successful because it builds the marriage relationship and draws the couple closer together.

Negotiation, although it seems more appropriate for board rooms and corporations, is another conflict management method that can be constructive in a marriage. Negotiation is a cooperative method which shows that the couple is able to accept responsibility, acknowledge the conflict, discuss the issues at hand, and reveal emotions and desires. They want to problem solve, compromise, make changes, and reconcile.[29] In the negotiation process, the individuals learn their partner's perspective, share their own thoughts and arguments, and listen to the counterargument. One person may concede, or the couple may decide to compromise.[30] Throughout the negotiation, it is important that neither person makes demands or becomes resigned. The hope of negotiation is to create a win-win situation. There may be times when the outcome does not have those desired results, but through the conversation, the couple reaches a desired outcome that brings peace and satisfaction to the problem.

There are several conflict management strategies that experts have created specifically for conflict within the marriage. These strategies are a step-by-step process for people to work through when conflict arises. Active listening, Gottman's five steps,

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[28] Greeff and De Bruyne, "Conflict Management Style and Marital Satisfaction," 331.

[29] Canary and Canary, *Family Conflict,* 29.

[30] Mejía-Arauz et al., "Collaboration or Negotiation," 117.

and Rainey's six steps are three processes that couples can navigate that lead to positive outcomes.

Active Listening. Active listening, also known as the validation model or mirroring model, is one of the preferred methods of conflict management by marriage counselors. This is where one spouse shares their concern or grievance, the other spouse paraphrases what was said without defense, and empathetically validates their feelings.[31] Active listening encourages the couple to engage in conversation, ask important questions, and empathize with each other. During active listening, each partner is calmly listening and trying to understand their partner's perspective so everyone feels valued. This method of conflict management is constructive because it is quality communication that challenges each person to understand their partner's perspective and validate their emotions.

A couple that engages in active listening prioritizes each other and communication. This method can be used when there is immediate conflict because it requires listening and an open mind. A wife is upset with her husband because he continues to forget to inform her of changes to his schedule at work and when he will be home late, which then causes her to have to change her routine to get their children to soccer practice on time. With the active listening strategy, the wife will calmly tell her husband what has happened and how she struggles with last-minute changes and little warning. The husband will listen without interrupting to make an excuse or defend, try to understand her perspective, and then articulate the situation and how she must feel: "I

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[31] John M., Gottman, James Coan, and Sybil Carrere, "Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability from Newlywed Interactions," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60, no. 1 (1998): 4, https://doi.org/10.2307/353438.

hear you. When I do not update my plans with you immediately, it changes your day and causes you a lot of stress." The husband can then inform her that he is very busy with work, his a boss constantly interrupts his workday to micromanage a project he is working on, and so he is often forgetful. This gives the wife a chance to understand everything from his perspective and she can validate his side: "I hear that you are under a lot of stress at work. Your boss is being very demanding." When the couple share their situations, feelings, and frustrations with each other and then validate one another, the conflict can be resolved in ways that benefit both people.

Gottman's Five-Step Process. Dr. John Gottman developed a five-step process for conflict management that he calls "problem solving." This method revolves around respect for each other and using manners. Step 1 is to approach the conversation with a soft start-up. It is typically the wife who will begin a conversation on conflict and want to work toward resolution.[32] How the wife addresses her grievance is crucial. A negative or hard start-up would make accusations, point fingers, blame, degrade the other, or offer criticism. A negative start-up would be when a spouse says, "You never listen to me! I told you I needed you to move the clothes from the washer to the dryer before work today so that your son has a clean uniform for his baseball game tonight." The opposite, a soft start-up, is where responsibility is shared, there is a positive expression of need, or an honest sharing of feelings. An example of a soft start-up would be when a spouse says, "Hey, our son has a baseball game tomorrow and we did not finish the laundry because

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[32] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 162.

we are both really busy." A soft start-up of a conversation around conflict can completely

change the atmosphere of the conflict.[33]

Step 2 is to accept and receive repair attempts. Repair attempts are ways in which

the couple can put on the brakes during the conflict and deescalate the atmosphere with

positivity through encouragement, acknowledgment, validation, and empathy.[34] This is

the point in a conversation when a spouse could say something like, "Wow! You had a

busy day. You work so hard for our family and I appreciate what you do to care for us. I

understand how you got so busy and forgot to start the laundry."

Step 3 is to soothe each other. Often conflict escalates to hostility quickly because

of emotional flooding, which is when emotions run wild and overwhelm. When this

happens, the conflict is not able to be resolved. To prevent emotional flooding, it is

important to self-soothe and soothe each other. There are many different ways to

soothe—take a break, meditate, massage, or visualize beautiful scenery.[35] Once everyone

is calm, the conflict management process can continue. For instance, couple who in the

middle of an argument over a baseball uniform could go on a walk together until they are

ready to continue to conversation.

Step 4 is to make compromises. This is when the couple wants to accommodate

each other, respect the other's opinions and perspective, and search for the common

ground in the relationship to find a solution suitable for everyone.[36] For instance, the

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[33] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 165.

[34] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 178.

[35] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 183.

[36] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 185.

husband could say, "How about we put a reminder on my phone to help me remember to start the laundry?" The wife could say, "Let's rearrange what we are doing. How about I start the laundry in the morning and then you can fold in the evenings?" The couple works together to find a way to fix their problems in a way which works well for everyone.

Step 5 is to clear the air and make sure that there are no grievances that remain. Often conflict can leave scars and injury in the marriage.[37] Bitterness will grow and destroy the relationship. It is important to make sure that all wounds have been addressed so they can heal without painful scars that can cause problems down the road. At the end of the conversation, the couple should ask, "Are we good here? Is there anything else bothering you?" These questions can help flush out any other issues which might still be there the couple needs to work out.

Rainey's Six-Step Conflict Resolution Process. Dennis Rainey is the founder of FamilyLife, a subsidiary of Campus Crusade for Christ. He and his wife, Barbara, have written several books on marriage and speak at numerous marriage events. Rainey has developed a six-step process to help couples through conflict. The first step is for a couple to recognize their differences, accept them, and make the right adjustments.[38] Most people marry someone who is opposite of who they are. Although opposites do attract, these differences can cause conflict.[39] When in conflict, it is important to

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[37] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 187.

[38] Dennis Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage," Family Life, 2002, https://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/resolving-conflict/6-steps-for-resolving-conflict-in-marriage/#

[39] Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage."

remember these differences. It will give each other insight into the conflict. For instance, the husband grew up in a wealthy family that always had family dinners and refrigerators and cabinets full of food. The wife grew up with parents who could not provide regular meals and often went hungry until she started her first job as a young teenager. The wife is upset because the husband had a late-night snack and left the milk on the counter and it has soured. In this conflict, if the spouses can remember their differences in their childhoods and accept them, they will be able to better understand each other's perspectives.

The second step is to not be selfish. Differences in a marriage can become magnified when there is selfishness.[40] When couples are selfish, they will show little concern for others and work to resolve the conflict in destructive ways. A husband who let milk spoil would be selfish if he pushed away her concerns, bragged about his family's income, or told her that if it really bothered her, she should check the kitchen every night before bed. A selfish wife would not give her husband time to explain or try to come up with a creative solution, but instead blame and berate him. Selfishness does not allow couples to work together to solve their conflict.

The third step Rainey suggests is for couples to pursue each other. This will require couples to put away their anger, resentment, and bitterness and not isolate from each other.[41] When a relationship between a couple is new, they pursue or seek out each other to spend time together. When in conflict, it is easy to want to be alone or find a false sense of peace in isolation. Conflict cannot be resolved unless both people work

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[40] Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage."

[41] Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage."

together. The conflict over the wasted groceries will never be resolved if the husband or wife storms off to a different room of the house and they spend the day apart. They have to pursue each other.

Rainey's fourth step is to confront each other out of love. This is a time when the couple listens to each other, expresses their concerns, and works through the problem that has caused the conflict.[42] Rainey recommends that couples check their motivations, watch their attitudes, make sure the circumstances are ideal, listen, be ready to accept what each other has to say, address one issue at a time, focus on the people and not the problem, try to evaluate the facts and not judge, and try not to form a winner or a loser.[43] It is not the time for the wife to confront her husband when she has a bad attitude or the motive to make her husband feel guilty about children who go hungry daily, or if he is running late for work that morning. That will escalate the conflict and not bring resolution. It would be best if she waited until he was not rushed, if her motives were to simply figure out how they could do their part to not be wasteful, and she is ready to listen to her husband's response. Rainey writes, "Confronting your spouse with grace and tactfulness requires wisdom, patience, and humility."[44] This is a difficult step in the process of conflict management, but it must be done well for there to be positive outcomes.

Forgiveness is the fifth step. "Forgiving means giving up resentment and the desire to punish. By an act of your will, you let the other person off the hook."[45] To keep

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[42] Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage."

[43] Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage."

[44] Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage."

[45] Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage."

resentment and bitterness out of the marriage, couples must work to forgive one another. Without forgiveness, the marriage will not heal after the conflict. If the wife forgives her husband over the spoiled milk, she will release any negative feelings she has and not punish her husband. If she does not forgive him, the anger will build up in her heart and it will cause her to pull away from her husband.

The final step in Rainey's process is to bless and not insult. It is common for people in conflict to offer insult after insult as a way of retaliation. Instead of insults, couples should bless each other through kindness and goodness. This can be done through words, a hug, a pat on the back, or completing a task that would please the other person.[46] The couple who argued over the wasted food could go for a walk together and hold hands as a way to bless each other at the end of the argument. This allows the couple a way to end the conflict on a positive note and reaffirm their relationship.

Unsolvable Constructive Conflict Management Methods

Every marriage has perpetual conflict that is unsolvable, such as different philosophies of time, money spending habits, or ideas of relaxation. Although there may not be a solution to the problem, it does need to be acknowledged and managed so that the conflict does not overwhelm the marriage. A study on long-term marriages through Boston College revealed that marriages endure perpetual conflict with satisfaction when both individuals understand their roles, expectations, and needs and have mutual respect, acceptance, and empathy.[47]

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[46] Rainey, "6 Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage."

[47] Mackey, Diemer, and O'Brien, "Conflict-Management Styles of Spouses in Lasting Marriages," 148.

With perpetual conflict management, it is important for couples to make sure that they do not put themselves in situations which can worsen or exasperate the conflict.[48] An example of perpetual conflict is a couple that continually struggles with different philosophies of time. The wife believes that to be on time they must arrive ten minutes early, whereas the husband believes that on time can range from ten minutes early to ten minutes late. Whenever the couple is ten minutes late, the wife is flustered and snippy and the husband gets defensive and irritated. This is one of their perpetual conflicts that they must prevent from escalation. They can manage this conflict with two cars. When the husband runs late and the wife knows she wants to be on time, she takes one car and he comes in the second when he is ready. The use of the second car, although not always practical, allows for the couple to prevent a wedge in their marriage that has pulled them apart in the past.

Evan Imber-Black is the Director of the Center for Families and Health at the Ackerman Institute and is the Program Director and a Professor for the Marriage and Family Therapy Masters Program at Mercy College. She has worked with numerous couples that have struggled with perpetual conflict. There are three methods she suggests for constructive perpetual conflict management: Take Turns, Switch Leadership, and Two-Part Conversation.

Take Turns. Take Turns is exactly as it sounds. Couples take turns to temporarily be in charge and resolve the issue in their own way. As one spouse leads, the other steps back, observes, and remains silent. After an agreed-upon time, the roles reverse and the leader takes the observation role while the other spouse becomes the leader. Then the

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[48] Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 139.

couple comes together to negotiate aloud with each other through for discussion and evaluation of their observations.[49] A couple who continually argues over how to do laundry could use the Take Turns approach. For two weeks, the wife could do laundry her way, which is to only do laundry on Saturdays and not worry about it on weekdays. The husband would observe, take notes, and not interfere. After the two weeks, the husband would take charge of laundry with his method—wash clothes as the laundry bins fill. This time the wife would take on the role of observer. Once the two weeks are over, the couple would come together to negotiate a plan that works for both spouses.

Switch Leadership. A variation of Take Turns is Switch Leadership. This occurs when each spouse has the opportunity to take leadership and devise a plan that they believe will work out well for both people.[50] Whereas Take Turns allows the spouse to focus on their own ideas and thoughts during their turn, Switch Leadership requires for the spouses to think of each other. A couple has been in perpetual conflict over the temperature of the house at bedtime. The wife is frustrated because she is always cold and has to pile on blankets, but the husband is always hot at bedtime. As the night progresses, the husband starts to get cold and steals the blankets off his wife. Using Switch Leadership, the wife takes leadership for a weekend and develops a plan that she thinks will please herself and her husband. She purchases twin-sized blankets for both of them to use and puts his in the middle of the bed so he could reach it when he got cold. When it was the husband's turn at leadership, he decided to take his evening shower right after the kids went to bed so that he could cool off before bedtime and raise the

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[49] Evan Imber-Black, "How to Solve Marital Conflict," Good Housekeeping, January 12, 2011, https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/relationships/advice/a13299/resolving-marital-conflict/

[50] Imber-Black, "How to Solve Marital Conflict."

thermostat a few degrees so the house would be warmer. The Switch Leadership method challenges the couple to think about their spouse and work to understand their needs.

    Two-Part Conversation. Imber-Black recommends that couples use the Two-Part Conversation method when perpetual conflict has caused the husband and wife to completely polarize from each other over a major decision where a compromise could not be met. This method is when the couple sets aside two different time periods a few days apart. They meet at a location where they both feel comfortable and safe for intentional conversation. The first time period would be focused on all the positives of their decisions and the second time period is dedicated to discussing the negatives.[51] For years, a couple has been in conflict because the husband does not like his job, but a change in his career would mean a transfer to another state. His wife is adamantly against moving, and over the past year this conflict has caused a lot of tension and prevented them for making plans for their future. With the Two-Part Conversation method, the couple makes plans for discussion on Monday night. They meet in the living room after their children are in bed. In this discussion, they only name the positives of a transfer: better boss, retains pension, possibilities to grow further in the company, less stress, more time for the family, closer to the beach, better weather, and more sports options. When the couple is finished listing as many positives as possible, they plan to meet two nights later to discuss the negatives: prepare the house to sell, leave friends, change schools for the kids, more expensive housing market, and further from grandparents. With this method, normal arguments that surface have to be tucked away and the couple will both have to think

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[51] Imber-Black, "How to Solve Marital Conflict."

through the pros and cons.[52] This method breaks apart the polarization as the couple has to come together to think through both sides of the conflict.

These methods of perpetual conflict management challenge the couples to try to understand all perspectives and push the couples together to work toward peace in the marriage. They all require for the couples to listen, be respectful, and have empathy for their spouse, because the conflict will only escalate without those requirements. Couples with perpetual conflict will have to learn to live with grace, forgiveness, and understanding for their marriage to work well and to prevent resentment and bitterness from the marriage.

Application to Church Conflict

Whereas businesses prioritize goals and evaluate the needed outcome to determine the best conflict management strategy, marriage conflict must prioritize the relationship between the two spouses. Churches must also prioritize the people involved in the conflict and, to do this, church leaders must learn to identify when conflict management has become deconstructive and how to make it constructive. Two mothers within the congregation have been tasked to update the church nursery and they disagree on the color to paint the walls. Both have chosen beautiful colors that would make the nursery look more modern, clean, and welcoming to toddlers. In this conflict, the priority is relationship between the two leaders over the outcome of the paint color. The church leaders will need to help these two mothers resolve the conflict in constructive ways to preserve and even grow the relationship.

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[52] Imber-Black, "How to Solve Marital Conflict."

Constructive conflict management strategies put an emphasis on the use of manners, respect, positivity, and empathy. They require couples to keep their tempers in check and to pause when it flares. Gottman's and Rainey's step-by-step processes both require the couple to calm down with they start to get aggravated. When church leaders notice disrespect or rude behaviors, they can pause the conversation and allow tempers to cool down. If a church leader does not pause the conversation, then the conflict will escalate, and people will not be able to listen to one another or understand a different perspective. The pause can be as simple as a time of prayer, a walk around the church grounds, a water break, breathing exercises, or a few moments of silence. At a finance team meeting, two members disagree on how to budget for youth ministries. One believes they should increase the budget to cover the cost of camp for several low-income families while the other believes it is the youth pastor's job to fundraise. If during the discussion the two members in conflict start to become disrespectful and polarized, the leader can pause the meeting and say, "Let's take a break, walk up to the youth rooms, and pray for clarity as we make this decision." Not only has the leader given everyone a chance to calm down, but he has given them a common task: to pray for clarity.

These constructive conflict strategies can help churches solve conflict immediately when they are encountered. Once the leaders and pastors have become trained in and comfortable with these conflict management processes, they can deal with conflict when it arises if the time is appropriate. If a lead pastor is in their office on a Monday morning and a congregational member shows up unexpectedly upset about the sermon yesterday, the pastor is equipped to lead a conversation toward conflict resolution immediately instead of scheduling a meeting on a future date.

There is no escaping unsolvable or perpetual conflict within the church. The list of perpetual conflict in the church is endless: worship music, sound levels, drinks allowed in the sanctuary, appropriate clothing for ministers, theology, requirements for church membership, and even how to respond to upset babies. Because these conflicts can easily overwhelm everyone involved, they are often swept under the rug and ignored. These conflicts, over time, can eat away at the health of the church. Although they may not be able to be resolved, church leaders can work to manage them in constructive ways that require empathy, grace, forgiveness, and respect. These conflicts must be named and the leaders need to be aware of them so that they can walk alongside their congregational members when they struggle with perpetual and possibly unsolvable conflict.

For marriage conflict resolution to be constructive, there must be equality in the relationship between spouses. There is no room for superiority, hierarchy, or low concern for one spouse, because this will cause the conflict to always be resolved in favor of one person while dismissing the other. At the church level, the congregation is comprised of a pastoral staff, ministry leaders, board members, and regular attenders. There will be times when conflict is between two people where one has superiority or leadership over the other and there is not an equality of power within the relationship. Church leaders and pastors need to be aware of the imbalance and find someone to hold them accountable for how they resolve the conflict. An executive pastor at a church was often in conflict with the lead pastor over several issues that stemmed from a different philosophy of ministry. After two years of failed attempts to compromise and collaborate with the lead pastor, the executive pastor stopped trying to work through the problems. The children's pastor approached this pastor and said, "I have noticed that you do not really contribute ideas or

give your opinion in staff meetings anymore. What's going on?" The executive pastor

responded, "It does not matter what I say. He always does everything his own way

anyway. It's pointless." The low concern the senior pastor had for the executive pastor

caused conflict to be avoided and unresolved. There needs to be accountability for leaders

and how they resolve conflict so that the people of power within the church choose to

resolve conflict in ways that are beneficial to the whole congregation.

Separation and Divorce

Separation is when a couple lives apart but remain legally married.[53] A physical

separation can give the couple time and space to decide if it is best for them to reconcile

or to dissolve the relationship.[54] After a couple separates due to conflict, there are three

options: divorce, enter into a different relationship with a new partner that results in

cohabitation but not marriage, or reconciliation between spouses.[55]

Georgina Binstock with the Centro de Destudios de Poblacion and Arland

Thornton from the Institute for Social Research did a study on marriage separation and

reconciliation with young adults from the ages of 15 to 31. This study revealed that 25%

of young couples that separate will reconcile at least once, but that reconciliation was

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[53] Emily Doskow, "Different Types of Separation: Trial, Permanent, and Legal Separation," DivorceNet, accessed January 5, 2020, https://www.divorcenet.com/resources/family/types-separation.htm.

[54] Jeff Landers, "Dos and Don't of Marital Separation," Forbes, April 4, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jefflanders/2017/04/04/dos-and-donts-of-marital-separation/#231ec5b84668.

[55] Georgina Binstock and Arland Thornton, "Separations, Reconciliations, and Living Apart in Cohabiting and Marital Unions," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65, no. 2 (2003): 439, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00432.x.

often short-term.[56] "We find that more than one third of those who reconcile have

separated again within a year, and this proportion rises to one half by the end of the third

year after reconciliation."[57] Thirty percent of individuals divorced after six months of

separation and 50 percent divorced after a year.[58] The results of this study reveal that if a

couple separates due to conflict, a divorce will soon follow.[59] Most marriages do not

survive a separation.

Hannah Pearce Plauche with the Department of Child and Family Services at

Louisiana State University and Loren D. Marks and Alan J. Hawkins from the School of

Family Life at Brigham Young University conducted interviews on seven married

couples that separated and then reconciled in the state of Louisiana. These interviews

reveal it takes a lot of hard work to reconcile a marriage successfully.[60] One of the main

takeaways from this study is most couples that were unsuccessful in reconciliation did

not have the support from a professional counselor or the social relationships to help

them through reconciliation, nor did the couples have a clear understanding of how to

work through their issues.[61] This study suggests if "couples formulate a plan and create

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[56] Binstock and Thornton, "Separations, Reconciliations, and Living Apart in Cohabiting and Marital Unions," 439.

[57] Binstock and Thornton, "Separations, Reconciliations, and Living Apart in Cohabiting and Marital Unions," 439.

[58] Binstock and Thornton, "Separations, Reconciliations, and Living Apart in Cohabiting and Marital Unions," 439.

[59] Binstock and Thornton, "Separations, Reconciliations, and Living Apart in Cohabiting and Marital Unions," 441.

[60] Hannah Pearce Plauche, Loren D. Marks, and Alan J. Hawkins, "Why We Chose to Stay Together: Qualitative Interviews with Separated Couples Who Chose to Reconcile," *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 57, no. 5 (2016): 324, https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2016.1185089.

[61] Plauche, Marks, and Hawkins, "Why We Chose to Stay Together," 318.

some common goals [it]could be a therapeutic approach to help with the transition."[62]

Open communication about goals, personal growth, and beliefs about marriage helped the

couples in the reconciliation process through separation.[63]

Divorce is when couples legally dissolve their marriage. People deal with

numerous and overlapping emotions with divorce: relief, hope, anger, grief, guilt,

depression, vulnerability, loneliness, jealousy, hurt, and rejection.[64] Conflict can become

a defense mechanism, allowing people to not deal with the emotions they have while

going through divorce.[65] Ziva Levite and Orna Cohen wrote *The Tango of Loving Hate:*

Couple Dynamics in High-Conflict Divorce and they state: "The majority of individuals

(about 75–80%) work through the changing emotions and return to some semblance of

normalcy within 2–3 years. For some, however, the conflict lasts longer, or even

throughout their lives, entangling them and their children in perpetual turmoil and

causing deep and lasting scars."[66] The conflict from marriage does not end with divorce.

For some couples, conflict will exist between them for the rest of their lives.

Divorce rates for second and third marriages are higher than first marriages.[67] Too

often, people remarry for the wrong reasons and have not recovered from their previous

marriage or their divorce. People enter into their next marriage before they have worked

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[62] Plauche, Marks, and Hawkins, "Why We Chose to Stay Together," 334.

[63] Plauche, Marks, and Hawkins, "Why We Chose to Stay Together," 334.

[64] Ziva Levite and Orna Cohen, "The Tango of Loving Hate: Couple Dynamics in High-Conflict Divorce," *Clinical Social Work Journal* 40, no. 1 (2012): 47, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-011-0334-5.

[65] Levite and Cohen, "The Tango of Loving Hate," 47.

[66] Levite and Cohen, "The Tango of Loving Hate," 46.

[67] Mark Banschick, "The High Failure Rate of Second and Third Marriages," Psychology Today, February 6, 2012, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201202/the-high-failure-rate-second-and-third-marriages.

out the issues from previous relationships and end up stuck in similar conflict patterns and behaviors.[68] Some people justify their second divorce because they survived their first and may even be willing to divorce faster when they see the signs that the marriage relationship is dissolving.[69]

Separation and Divorce Application to Church Conflict

The careful practice of separation could be a tool in local church conflict management. Separation could be considered when a congregational member is stuck in the emotions of anger and resentment, escalates difficult situations, or regularly causes conflict. The time apart could allow the person the time and space to consider if reconciliation is possible and the steps that need to be taken to repair the broken relationships. It would be crucial for this person to not embark on a journey of separation alone, but to have support, goals, and counseling. Marriage separations are not highly successful at reconciliation, but it could be used within congregations when situations become dire. A lady in the church has been the Kitchen Director for the past ten years. She has helped the church upgrade the kitchen, create kitchen guidelines for use, and obtain a commercial kitchen license. Over the past couple of years, people have not been respectful of the guidelines she has set so the church can maintain its license to serve food. Bitterness and resentment have hardened her heart over the past year. Her anger has started to seep into complaints and gossip at her small group meetings and she has lost

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[68] Banschick, "The High Failure Rate of Second and Third Marriages."

[69] Banschick, "The High Failure Rate of Second and Third Marriages."

her temper with several volunteers. People from the community have stopped coming to meals and volunteer sign-ups have declined.

After many attempts to resolve the situation, the pastor has decided that this is a perpetual conflict, so he took a drastic approach and asked her to take a separation from her ministry and possibly from the church for a determined time. This would give her some space and time to work through her frustrations, release her anger, and find time to rest with the help and support of a few members from the church board. Once the time has passed, if she has a good attitude and has been able to forgive the people she felt wronged her, she can return to ministry and the congregation.

There will be times in local churches when there will be a dissolvement of relationships between congregational members and people will leave. Congregational members, for the well-being of everyone involved, will divorce their church family. Conflict does not disappear when people leave the church, and they could experience the same conflict in the next church. Just as second and third marriages have a higher rate for divorce, the same could be said for the second and third church family. Once someone has left their home church, it will be easier to leave their next.

Pastor and ministry leaders need to be aware of people who have left their previous church due to conflict and work with them so that previous patterns to do not continue and to help them heal from their previous experiences. Sometimes the best option is divorce—for people to leave the church—but it must be done in healthy ways that allow people to engage in healthy relationships at their next churches.

Premarital Education and Counseling

In the 1960s and 1970s, the divorce rate in the United States started to rise and, as a response, researchers started to develop and implement educational programs to help couples prevent divorce.[70] Premarital counseling is a process for engaged couples that helps them to enrich their relationship with the goal of creating a more stable and satisfying marriage and to prevent divorce.[71] Physicians, mental health workers, and clergy are the main people who provide and oversee premarital counseling.[72] This counseling can be done in groups with other engaged couples or it can be done privately with a counselor or pastor.[73]

The Prevention and Relationship Education Program (PREP) is the most rigorously researched program developed for premarital counseling.[74] It is an empirical method of premarital counseling that was created to teach communication, conflict

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[70] Howard J. Markman, Galena K. Rhoades, Scott M. Stanley, and Kristina M. Peterson, "A Randomized Clinical Trial of the Effectiveness of Premarital Intervention: Moderators of Divorce Outcomes," *Journal of Family Psychology* 27, no. 1 (2013): 165, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031134.

[71] Robert F. Stahmann, "Premarital Counselling: A Focus for Family Therapy," *Journal of Family Therapy* 22, no. 1 (2000): 105, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.00140.

[72] Stahmann, "Premarital Counselling," 105.

[73] Stahmann, "Premarital Counselling," 105.

[74] Elizabeth A. Schilling, Donald H. Baucom, Charles K. Burnett, Elizabeth Sandin Allen, and Lynelle Ragland, "Altering the Course of Marriage: The Effect of PREP Communication Skills Acquisition on Couples' Risk of Becoming Maritally Distressed," *Journal of Family Psychology* 17, no. 1 (2003): 41, https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.17.1.41.

management,[75] emotional safety, positive connections, and deep commitment.[76] Other

programs developed for marriage counseling include Relationship Enhancement, Couples

Communication, and Couple Commitment and Relationship Enhancement. These

programs are usually done in a workshop format with other couples.[77]

Premarital counseling methods done with clergy vary. The services are dependent

on the religious organization and their religious leaders. It can include personality

assessment and feedback, training on different marriage topics such as finances and

family planning, trainings on communication that is similar to PREP, and wedding

ceremony logistics.[78]

There have been many studies on the effectiveness of premarital counseling. A

number of studies have shown the premarital counseling is effective to help couples

prevent divorce.[79] The University of Denver conducted a study that compared premarital

counseling between PREP and premarital counseling that has been planned and organized

by clergy. The results showed that both methods were effective in the prevention of

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[75] Shelby B. Scott, Galena K. Rhoades, Scott M. Stanley, Elizabeth S. Allen, and Howard J. Markman, "Reasons for Divorce and Recollections of Premarital Intervention: Implications for Improving Relationship Education," *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice* 2, no. 2 (2013): 131, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032025

[76] Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, and Peterson, "A Randomized Clinical Trial of the Effectiveness of Premarital Intervention," 165.

[77] Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, and Peterson, "A Randomized Clinical Trial of the Effectiveness of Premarital Intervention," 167.

[78] Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, and Peterson, "A Randomized Clinical Trial of the Effectiveness of Premarital Intervention," 168.

[79] Scott M. Stanley, Paul R. Amato, Christine A. Johnson, and Howard J. Markman, "Premarital Education, Marital Quality, and Marital Stability: Findings From a Large, Random Household Survey," *Journal of Family Psychology* 20, no. 1 (2006): 118, https://doi.org/ 10.1037/0893-3200.20.1.117.

divorce.[80] Premarital education through workshops and premarital counseling with clergy can both help couples lay a strong foundation for a satisfying marriage.

Scott M. Stanley from the University of Denver, Paul R. Amato from Pennsylvania State University, Christine A. Johnson from Oklahoma State University, and Howard J. Markman from the University of Denver conducted a research project that surveyed 3,344 randomly chosen adults from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Kansas to ask questions about premarital counseling and marriage satisfaction.[81] This research showed that "participation in premarital education was associated with higher levels of satisfaction and commitment in marriage and lower levels of conflict—and reduced odds of divorce."[82] Also, this study revealed interesting results for the time spent in premarital counseling: "Marital conflict declined continuously as premarital education increased from 1 to 10 hours but declined little with additional hours."[83] The time couples engage in premarital education, up to ten hours, directly correlates with the decline of conflict. The work put into a marriage before the wedding vows can help couples understand their triggers for conflict and learn the steps to work through when conflict arises.

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[80] Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, and Peterson, "A Randomized Clinical Trial of the Effectiveness of Premarital Intervention," 169.

[81] Stanley, Amato, Johnson, and Markman, "Premarital Education, Marital Quality, and Marital Stability," 118.

[82] Stanley, Amato, Johnson, and Markman, "Premarital Education, Marital Quality, and Marital Stability," 117.

[83] Stanley, Amato, Johnson, and Markman, "Premarital Education, Marital Quality, and Marital Stability," 122.

Pre-Member Counseling and Training

In correlation, if premarital counseling is effective for creating marriages that are satisfying and healthy, perhaps counseling would be a way to increase satisfaction and healthiness in the church. Churches could create workshops and counseling opportunities for people before they become church members or become active attendees in the life of the congregation. Counseling and workshops could help train people on communication, conflict resolution, and relationship skills. This would allow church leaders the opportunity to teach members how to react to conflict and healthy methods of conflict resolution.

There are couples that are not ultimately compatible, and they can discover this through premarital education. In the same way every person is not compatible with every local church. There are many different expressions of church in God's Kingdom. Welcome and introductory workshops would be beneficial to help people find a local church that is a good fit—where they can grow deep roots and flourish. Conflicts over theological, philosophical, and missional issues can be flushed out before they happen when people are taught early the beliefs of the church. For instance, a couple just moved to town and want to join a local church. They attend a church for two weeks and get invited to a welcome workshop with the pastor or leader. While in the workshop, the couple learns that the church has a different approach to Scripture that causes them unease and discomfort. This couple can then choose whether this is a theological conflict they will cope with or if this local church is not the congregation to join. The conflict was handled before it had the opportunity to become divisive within the local church.

Welcome workshops and counseling have the potential to prevent divisive conflicts and teach new congregational members how to navigate conflict in healthy ways.

People Matter

Marriage is one of the most intimate relationships people can form. There is not a single marriage that does not experience conflict. Healthy and satisfied marriages are able to harness their conflict and use it to bring growth to the relationship through constructive conflict management. Through the study of marriages, the church is given the opportunity to learn how to successfully navigate conflict in healthy ways. Too often, it is not the conflict itself that causes harm, but the way in which it is managed. When the church uses constructive conflict management methods that include positivity, a high concern for all individuals, careful listening, validation, and empathy, it can create unity and growth even when working through conflict.

There are moments when pastors and leaders will need to immediately respond to conflict. With training, especially before members join the church or take on a leadership role, people can be prepared on conflict resolution steps. One of the most important steps is to actively listen to understand another perspective. The second important step to remember is to intentionally pause and take a break when emotions run high or the atmosphere becomes tense.

In workplace conflict, managers must look at goals, outcomes, productions, and bottom lines to help determine the desired outcome, whereas marriage conflict resolution focuses on the relationship of the couple. In church conflict, the pastor and leaders must remember that the people matter! The next chapter will look at the life and ministry of Jesus and how he, out of love for people, harnessed conflict to better the Kingdom of

God. It will also look at the words of Paul and how he instructed the church to live in unity.

CHAPTER 5:

SCRIPTURE THROUGH THE LENS OF CONFLICT

Conflict is not a modern byproduct of relationships. Since the creation of humanity, there has been conflict. Christian leaders, businesses, and counselors, as discussed in previous chapters, have only recently started to develop conflict management theories, but conflict has always been a part of humanity's narrative. The Bible is filled with story after story of conflict between families, tribes, nations, disciples, and missionaries, and between humanity and the Triune God.

This chapter will examine a Scripture commonly used by religious leaders to teach conflict management, Matthew 18:15-20. Then it will explore situations of conflict involved in the Gospel narratives and how Jesus responded. Next, this chapter will study excerpts from Paul's letters in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 to learn what Paul taught on the unity of the church, resurrected life, and their effects on healthy conflict resolution. Finally, this chapter will reflect on how local congregations can respond to conflict in ways that are aligned with Jesus' teachings and examples, and the instructions of Paul.

Matthew 18:15-20

> If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 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. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Matthew 18:15-20 is the Scripture that most Christian leaders use to inform their methods of congregational conflict management. To understand the instructions of Jesus in these verses, it is imperative to look at the pericopes that come before and after Matthew 18:15-20. It is also important to understand the honor/shame culture Jesus spoke into when he gave these instructions to his disciples.

The pericope before Matthew 18:15-20 is the parable of the lost sheep in verses 10-14. In Matthew 18:12, a sheep "has gone astray" and the shepherd leaves the herd to go and find that one lost sheep. When the sheep is found, the shepherd rejoices over it and brings it back to the herd. Jesus uses this parable to reveal how much God cares for his "little ones" and illuminate the goal of his desire to bring the "little ones" back into the community when they have gone astray.[1] The pericope that follows is Matthew 18:21-35 and is focused on forgiveness. Jesus instructs his disciples to not only forgive once or seven times, but to forgive seventy-seven times. He then told the parable of the unforgiving servant. These verses reinforce the intent of Matthew 18:15-20 in that it is not conviction, but reformation,[2] and not condemnation, but salvation, to which Jesus is referring.[3]

The New Testament Jewish and Greco-Roman culture was steeped in the concept of honor and dishonor (shame).[4] Seneca was a philosopher and statesman from Rome in

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[1] Rikard Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 79 (2014): 106, http://ths.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1357447&dswid=-7044.

[2] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," 106.

[3] Douglas R.A. Hare, *Interpretations: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 214, Kindle.

[4] David DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 43, EBook Central.

the first century and he said, "The one firm conviction from which we move to the proof of other points is this: that which is honorable is held dear for no other reason than because it is honorable."[5] The people made their decisions based on the values of honor and shame. Honor equated respect,[6] people desired it, and it was accredited to people through birth, status, power, family lineage, and virtuous behaviors.[7] Shame meant that a person was seen as disrespectful and disgraceful because they made choices that were not aligned with the values of their culture.[8] Shame produced two outcomes: reintegration or deintegration.[9] Reintegration required a series of works-based actions in order to secure the return of the individual into the community, whereas deintegration led to exclusion and marginalization.[10]

Matthew 18:15-20 must be examined through the lenses of care, redemption, salvation, and the honor/shame culture. The instructions that Jesus gave his disciples are for the situation when a believer sins against another and the offense cannot be overlooked due to the danger that sin poses.[11] These instructions are not for believers who are in disputes or disagreements that do not involve potentially dangerous sin.[12] According to Jeffry A. Gibbs and Jeffrey J. Kloha, who are Associate Professors of

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[5] DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity,* 23.

[6] DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity,* 25.

[7] DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity,* 28.

[8] DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity,* 25.

[9] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," 99.

[10] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," 99.

[11] Jeffery A. Gibbs and Jeffrey J. Kloha, "'Following' Matthew 18: Interpreting Matthew 18:15-20 in Its Context," *Concordia Journal* 29, no. 1 (2003): 10, ATLAS.

[12] Gibbs and Kloha, "'Following' Matthew 18," 10.

Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary, Matthew 18:15-20 "is not about 'conflict resolution' per se,"[13] but it can be applied to conflict if people are careful not to use it abusively toward others. [14] The true purpose of this Scripture "is about deep concern for a brother who has been overtaken in a trespass."[15] This excerpt should not be taken from a legalistic or strategic perspective, but as a method to care for brothers and sisters who have stumbled in their relationship with God and the community.

In Matthew 18:15a, Jesus instructs the offended to approach the offender alone. Privacy is important if the goal of the confrontation is care, salvation, and redemption. A discreet moment together between people gives way to a reintegrative process that draws the person back into the community instead of deintegrative shame that pushes the person away from the community.[16] Jesus wanted to protect his children from public shame and humiliation.

Jesus continues his instructions in Matthew 18:15b, saying, "If the member listens to you, you have regained that one." The hope is that once this member is approached, they will listen, seek forgiveness, and experience redemption. Then Jesus says in verses 16-17, "But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." Here Jesus instructs his

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[13] Gibbs and Kloha, "'Following' Matthew 18," 10.

[14] Gibbs and Kloha, "'Following' Matthew 18," 10.

[15] Gibbs and Kloha, "'Following' Matthew 18," 10.

[16] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," 107.

disciples to make three attempts to get the person who sinned to listen. Each time more people are invited into the situation, which would result in more shame for the offender. After the third time, if the offender refuses to listen to the community, the person should be ostracized and no longer be a member of the fellowship.[17]

In Matthew 18:18 Jesus says, "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." Jesus uses the "bind" and "loose" metaphor that he had previously used in Matthew 16:19 when he told Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." There are many different thoughts on the implications of this metaphor. J. Duncan M. Derret, Professor of Oriental Law at The University of London supports the claim that Jesus, when he told them to "bind" and "loose," gave power to his disciples to determine what was and was not righteous.[18] Richard Heirs is a professor at Levin College of Law with the University of Florida and is an expert in American Law and Biblical Law. He supports that this metaphor refers to Satan, demons, and their victims.[19] The disciples were given power to act as exorcists and call out the demons from people and to bind Satan and his beings. Douglas Hare, a New Testament scholar and professor, understands this metaphor to be related to disciplinary action and the church was given permission to punish or exclude.[20] Mark Allan Powell is the Robert and Phyllis Leatherman Professor

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[17] Hare, *Interpretations,* 213.

[18] J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Binding and Loosing (Matt 16:19, Matt 18:18, John 20:23)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 1 (March 1983): 115, https://doi.org/10.2307/3260751.

[19] Richard H. Hiers, "'Binding' and 'Loosing': The Matthean Authorizations," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 2 (1985): 235, https://doi.org/10.2307/3260965.

[20] Hare, *Interpretations,* 214.

of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary and he believes that through this

metaphor Jesus gave his disciples his blessing to determine how to apply Scriptural

commands in current culture.[21]

Rikard Roitto, Associate Professor at Stockhold School of Theology argues verse

18 is a prayer and that this metaphor, from the perspective of the honor/shame culture of

the New Testament and the context of this pericope in Matthew 18, is based around

forgiveness and ritual. According to Roitto, "to loose" is a reintergrative ritual and "to

bind" is a deintegrating ritual.[22] Reintegrative shame should be followed by reintegrative

rituals that allow the transgressor to detach from the sin that was committed. Rituals were

a method of communication to the community[23] and through a reintegrative ritual the

community would come to know that the offender has experienced salvation and

redemption. An example of reintegrative ritual would be intercessory prayer.[24] In verse

18 Jesus says, "whatever you loose" and "whatever you bind" and not "whoever you

loose" and "whoever you bind." "Whatever" refers to the transgression and not the

person. A person should never pray to loose a person, but to loose their sin and shame.

This allows for people to be seen outside of their wrongdoings. This is crucial in conflict

resolution because it can be easy to only see the conflict and lose sight of the other people

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[21] Mark Allan Powell, "Binding and Loosing: A Paradigm for Ethical Discernment from the Gospel of Matthew," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30, no. 6 (2003): 438, ATLAS.

[22] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," 96.

[23] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," 118.

[24] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," 114.

involved. A sin can be detached, or loosed, from the offender through prayer.[25]

Therefore, the community takes part in intercessory prayer as a reintegration ritual.

The instructions Jesus gives are closed with a promise, verse 19-20, "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Jesus promises he will be present when two of his alienated followers gather together to work toward reconciliation with each other.[26] Jesus will never leave his children to work through their hurt, anger, and brokenness alone. Jesus' presence will bring humility and strength, because it is for the sake of Jesus that a solution must be found.[27]

Jesus instructs his disciples on how to approach a member of the church who has sinned with dangerous and severe consequences. It is to be done in care and he gives the use of reintegrative shame as a tool to bring the lost sheep back into the herd. This reintegrative shame is to be immediately followed with reintegrative rituals that celebrate and communicate the lost one's return. Jesus also promises his presence, that one will never be alone, in the midst of reconciliation between congregational members.

Gospel Stories

The four Gospels are filled with stories of conflict that Jesus encountered throughout his life and ministry. It should not be a surprise that Jesus regularly had to

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[25] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20," 114.

[26] Hare, *Interpretations,* 215.

[27] Hare, *Interpretations,* 215.

engage in conflict as a participant and as a third party. This section will explore how Jesus responds to conflict with a woman caught in sin; the Pharisees; his hometown; his friends Mary and Martha; his disciple Peter; and his own intrapersonal conflict.

Jesus and the Woman Caught in Adultery

In John 8, Jesus goes to the temple early in the morning. People gather around Jesus to hear him teach. Jesus is interrupted when the Pharisees bring to him a woman who had been caught in adultery. The woman is forced to stand in front of Jesus and the people who came to listen to him teach. The Pharisees use her in her vulnerable state to test Jesus. They are looking for a way to bring charges against Jesus and this is their opportunity. The Pharisees ask, in verses 4-5, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

In this story, Jesus is invited into many different conflicts. The first conflict is the issue of the woman who has been caught in adultery with Jesus cast as judge. The second conflict is the issue of how the Pharisees respond to and embarrass the woman. The third conflict is between Jesus and the Pharisees and how they want to bring charges against him.

In the midst of this conflict, Jesus bends down and writes on the ground with his finger. The Pharisees do not go away but continue to question him. Then Jesus stands up and says, in verse 7, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Immediately Jesus bends back down and continues to write on the ground. Jesus uses this conflict as an opportunity to teach through word and sign, though it is not

known what he is scribbling on the ground.[28] Jesus also turns this conflict into a time of

self-reflection and honest self-judgment.[29] This self-judgment forces the Pharisees to see

the woman caught in adultery within themselves and to recognize their own sins. After

the Pharisees hear Jesus' words, they slowly start to leave until eventually Jesus is left

alone with the woman. Jesus stands back up and says, in verse 10, "Woman, where are

they? Has no one condemned you?" The woman responds and tells Jesus there is no one.

Jesus says, verse 11, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not

sin again."

In a commentary on John 8:1-22, Augustine writes that there are three distinctive

characteristics about Jesus: he is always truthful, always gentle, and always just.[30] In the

midst of this conflict, Jesus' truthfulness, gentleness, and justice are evident. His

truthfulness is evident when he commands the woman to sin no more. Jesus is gentle

when he does not condemn, lecture, berate, or mistreat her. The Pharisees demand justice,

to be stoned to death, which is in line with the Law of Moses, but Jesus practices

merciful[31] justice when he challenges the Pharisees to examine their own sin in their

lives. Truthfulness, gentleness, and merciful justice are important for healthy conflict

resolution.

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[28] Paul Sevier Minear, "Writing on the Ground: The Puzzle in John 8:1-11." *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 13, no. 1 (1991): 26. ATLAS.

[29] Minear, "Writing on the Ground," 30.

[30] Fabian Larcher, James A. Weisheipl, Daniel Keating, and Matthew Levering, *Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 6-12* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 100, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[31] Larcher, Weisheipl, Keating, and Levering, *Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 6-12,* 104.

Jesus in Nazareth

Mark 6:1-6 tells the story of how Jesus and his disciples go to the town of Nazareth. In John 1:46, a disciple named Nathaniel asks, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was a town filled with lowlifes and had a bad reputation.[32] This town of ill repute is Jesus' hometown, where his family still lives.

On the Sabbath, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth to teach. The people are astounded and start to ask questions and conflict erupts. In Mark 6:2-3, the people say, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" The realization of who Jesus is and his teachings offend the people. He is rejected not only by the people of his hometown, but also by his own flesh and blood.[33] Jesus responds in verse 4, saying, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." Jesus does not have power in Nazareth except to lay hands on a few of the sick to cure them. Their rejection of Jesus leaves him powerless.[34] Jesus is amazed by the unbelief in Nazareth.

In this conflict, the town of Nazareth is offended, Jesus is rejected by his hometown and family, and he is rendered powerless from their unbelief. Jesus does not try to teach again in the synagogue, and he does not argue his identity. In the midst of this

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[32] Leonard Sweet, "Advance: Thursday" (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 7, 2017).

[33] Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 84, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[34] Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 84.

conflict, Jesus walks away from his hometown and family. He leaves Nazareth behind

and travels to other villages to teach and do miracles. Jesus does not escalate the conflict,

but instead he withdraws from it. There are times in conflict where the best option is to

withdraw and separate from it. Jesus accepted that this conflict was unsolvable, but did

not let it prevent him from his ministry. He continued and went to the next town.

Mary and Martha

In Luke 10:1-12, Jesus sends out seventy people on a missionary journey. They

were to travel in pairs and visit the villages and Jesus would follow in their steps. Jesus

instructs them not to bring sandals, bags, or purses with them. Jesus says to them, in

verses 5-9,

> Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there
> who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return
> to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for
> the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.
> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before
> you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come
> near to you."

These seventy missionaries were to not worry, but to rely on the hospitality of the

villagers to meet their needs.

Later in Luke 10:38-42, Jesus is on the road traveling with his disciples when they

came to a village. Jesus, just like his disciples, is vulnerable because he relies on the

graciousness and hospitality of others to meet his needs.[35] There are two sisters, Martha

and Mary, who live together in the village. Martha is a woman of authority in her home,

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[35] M. R. Bumpus, "Awakening Hidden Wholeness: A Jungian View of Luke 10:38-42," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 29, no. 3 (2010): 230, ProQuest.

and has the ability to meet Jesus' needs, and, therefore, welcomes Jesus into her home.[36]

When Martha receives Jesus into her home, it is not merely meeting his physical needs of

food and clothing, but also embracing his eschatological mission.[37] Warren Carter is the

LaDonna Kramer Meinders Professor of New Testament at Phillips Seminary and an

expert in Greek New Testament. According to Carter, "Martha appears in v 38 as an

embodiment of the positive responses named through chapter 10."[38] She has accepted

Jesus and his disciples, believes their message about the Kingdom of God, and offers

great hospitality, which, therefore, made her a recipient of the promised peace in

Luke 10:9, a blessed disciple, and she has inherited eternal life.[39]

When Jesus arrives at Martha's home, Mary goes to Jesus, sits at his feet in the

position of a disciple, and listens to him speak. Luke 10:40 says that, "Martha was

distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." The Greek word for

"preparations" is "διακονία," and is better translated to "service" or "ministry."[40] Carter

writes, "Rather than designating a person of inferior status involved in table waiting or

domestic service, διάκονος in Luke's usage typically designates a commissioned

spokesperson or agent, a 'go-between' who ministers on behalf of God or the Christian

community."[41] Mary is not distracted by household chores, but by her ministry on behalf

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[36] Bumpus, "Awakening Hidden Wholeness," 230.

[37] Warren Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen: Luke 10:38-42 Again," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (1996): 267, EBSCOhost.

[38] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 267.

[39] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 267.

[40] "1248. Diakonia," Bible Hub, accessed November 8, 2019, https://biblehub.com/greek/1248.htm.

[41] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 272.

of Jesus Christ. Also, the use of διάκονος strongly indicates that ministry is not done alone, but with a partner.[42] Mary is not only Martha's sister, but she is also her partner in ministry.

In the midst of her ministry, Martha says to Jesus, in verse 40, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" There is conflict between these ministry partners because Martha feels that Mary is not doing her part.[43] Martha invites Jesus into the conflict as a mediator and wants him to intervene on her behalf so Mary could get to work and help in their ministry. Franklin Scott Spencer, author of *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke's Gospel*, interprets her words to be a complaint against her lazy sister.[44] Warren Carter argues that Mary's words are prayerful and a heartful request to Jesus.[45]

In Luke 10:41-42, Jesus responds to Mary's prayer and says, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Jesus' response is instructions for the two sisters on how to remain partners in ministry.[46] The first item Jesus addresses is Martha's anxiety. Anxiety divides the attention of the heart and causes Martha to not be single-hearted. Thus, Jesus instructs Martha to join her sister

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[42] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 275.

[43] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 275.

[44] F. Scott Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows : Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 95, ProQuest Ebook.

[45] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 276.

[46] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 276.

and to listen to his teachings as a method to overcome her worries and anxiety so that she can be single-hearted.[47] Jesus gives Martha a tool to use to help her with her anxiety and which will, in return, help her in ministry.

These two verses, Luke 10:41-42, have been a source of great controversy. This passage has traditionally been interpreted to polarize two sisters, to elevate Mary and the life of contemplation over Martha's life of action and labor.[48] In the article *Getting Mary Out of the Kitchen* Warren Carter writes,

> Since the context and content of Martha's complaint and request concern partnership in ministry and leadership, Martha cannot be viewed as exclusively domestic and secular, nor Mary as contemplative and submissive. Since Martha and Mary are partners in ministry, these "either-or" approaches are not viable options. A "both-and" relationship is required.[49]

Jesus does not take sides in this conflict between Mary and Martha. He does not elevate one sister over the other or seek to change social boundaries. Instead, Jesus works to reconcile the relationship between the two and offers a "both/and" approach, finding a third way when he instructs the sisters to live in the tension between a contemplative life and an active life. Martha must be more contemplative for her to remain single-hearted in her ministry and Mary must be active in her ministry. This conflict does not result in a "win/lose" situation but in affirmation in the partnership of these two sister ministry leaders.

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[47] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 277.

[48] David Grumett, "Action and/or Contemplation?: Allegory and Liturgy in the Reception of Luke 10:38-42," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59, no. 2 (2006): 127, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930606002195.

[49] Carter, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen," 277.

Jesus and the Pharisees

Throughout Jesus' ministry, he had numerous conflict encounters with the Pharisees. In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus is in the synagogue teaching on the Sabbath. Since Jesus is teaching, he has taken on the role of a synagogue teacher; a role that was typically held by a scribe.[50] A woman who had been crippled and unable to stand straight enters the synagogue. For eighteen years, this woman has lived a limited life that has kept her focused on the ground below her. She has been unable to lift her hands in praise, hug children, look people in the eye, or look up into the sky.[51] This woman does not seek out Jesus, but she catches his attention and he calls her over to him. The synagogue signifies a sacred place and the Sabbath is a sacred time,[52] whereas the crippled woman symbolizes the profane and uncleanliness.[53] Therefore, this story is a collision of the sacred and the profane. In verse 12 Jesus says to her, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." He lays his hands on her and immediately she stands upright and begins to praise God. The leader of the synagogue becomes indignant at this and speaks to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day." Jesus is in conflict with this religious leader because

[50] Jordan J. Ryan, "Jesus and Synagogue Disputes: Recovering the Institutional Context of Luke 13:10-17," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2017): 56, https://doi.org/10.1353/cbq.2017.0002.

[51] Stephen H. Phelps, "Between Text & Sermon: Luke 13:10-17," *Interpretation* 55, no. 1 (2001): 64, ProQuest.

[52] Francois Bovon and Nancy P. Sevcenko, "Byzantine Art and Gospel Commentary: The Case of Luke 13:6-9, 10-17," *Cambridge University Press* 109, no. 2 (2016): 259, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816016000055.

[53] Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Feasting on the Gospels. Volume 2, Chapters 12-24, Luke : A Feasting on the Word Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 34, ProQuest Ebook Central.

of their different interpretations of Sabbath law.[54] The leader's words initiate a legal

dispute and a challenge to Jesus that reaches a resolution through the crowd and not the

religious leader.[55] Jesus and the synagogue leader's honor are on the line and depend on

the outcome of this conflict.[56]

This narrative must be examined through the lens of the honor/shame culture of

the New Testament. In an honor/shame culture, a person or group of people could gain

honor through a process called challenge-riposte.[57] In this method, honor came at the

expense of another when one person or group issued a public challenge to another. This

challenge was supposed to be unanswerable, yet a challenge required a response, even if

it is only silence.[58] After the response was given, the witnesses to this conversation would

then decide if the person challenged was able to defend their honor or be shamed.[59]

Jesus responds to this challenge with a clever criticism and says, in verses 15-16,

"You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from

the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of

Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the

Sabbath day?" The most significant part of this passage is the crowd's response to Jesus's

words,[60] in verse 17, "When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the

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[54] Jordan J. Ryan, "Jesus and Synagogue Disputes: Recovering the Institutional Context of Luke 13:10-17," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2017): 42, https://doi.org/10.1353/cbq.2017.0002.

[55] Ryan, "Jesus and Synagogue Disputes," 56.

[56] Ryan, "Jesus and Synagogue Disputes," 56.

[57] DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity,* 29.

[58] DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity,* 29.

[59] DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity,* 29.

[60] Ryan, "Jesus and Synagogue Disputes," 58.

entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing." Jesus is

honored, his opponents are shamed, and the future practice of Sabbath law at this local

synagogue is changed.[61]

Over and over, the religious leaders attempt to become more honorable at the

expense of Jesus, as the Pharisees do their best to attempt to shame Jesus. For example, in

Mark 2 Jesus is challenged by the religious leaders about forgiving the sins of others,

eating with sinners, fasting, and Sabbath law. Rikard Roitto writes, "In all Gospels, for

instance, Jesus wins all arguments with other Jewish leaders by successfully delivering a

riposte to their negative challenges. The by-standing crowd gives Jesus honor and his

opponents go away in shame."[62] Jesus maintains and grows in honor through every

conflict.

Conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders always results in a "win-lose"

outcome. In Matthew 23:2-7, Jesus instructs the crowds and his disciples concerning the

Pharisees and Scribes:

> The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they
> teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what
> they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders
> of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do
> all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and
> their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best
> seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to
> have people call them rabbi.

Then, verses 13-36 Jesus says six times "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,

hypocrites!" Jesus does not compromise, collaborate, or accommodate to the needs and

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[61] Ryan, "Jesus and Synagogue Disputes," 58.

[62] Roitto, "Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20,"
101.

desires of hypocrites. Jesus uses wisdom to discern the type of outcome that each situation requires. Who Jesus is in conflict with, and their agendas and intentions, determines how Jesus will respond to conflict.

Jesus in Gethsemane

On the night Jesus is betrayed, he takes his disciples with him to Gethsemane for prayer. Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:39-46 give accounts to Jesus' intrapersonal conflict that he deals with on his knees in prayer. When Jesus arrives in the garden, he takes Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him and leaves the remaining disciples to pray. Matthew 26:37 says that Jesus became sorrowful and troubled. Then, he says to the three men, in verse 38, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Jesus moves further into the garden, where he falls to the ground and prays, in verse 39, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." Jesus knows that his death is imminent yet prays that God would take it away from him. "His agonized plea for some other way reveals a deep inner revulsion at what was to come."[63] Jesus is in conflict over his prospect to his death and God's purposes.[64]

In Jesus' prayer, he uses the metaphor of the "cup." The cup as a metaphor is used differently throughout Scriptures for blessing, judgment, punishment, and suffering.[65] In Psalm 23:5, the cup is a metaphor for blessing: "You prepare a table before me in the

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[63] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 670, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[64] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 672.

[65] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 525.

presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." The metaphor is most often used to symbolize judgment and punishment, as in Ezekiel 23: 32-34, "You shall drink your sister's cup, deep and wide; you shall be scorned and derided, it holds so much. You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow. A cup of horror and desolation is the cup of your sister Samaria; you shall drink it and drain it out, and gnaw its sherds, and tear out your breasts." In Lamentations 4:21, the cup represents suffering: "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter Edom, you that live in the land of Uz; but to you also the cup shall pass; you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare." The "cup" that Jesus mentions in his prayer refers to his death,[66] but also his impending suffering, God's anger, and separation from his Father.[67] This "cup" causes great conflict and trouble within him.

Jesus concludes his prayer with the statement, "Yet not as I will, but as you will." Jesus' intrapersonal conflict does not prevent him from obedience to God's will. Jesus does not abandon God's plan that leads him to the cross but surrenders his life to God's purposes. In the midst of his conflict, Jesus practices surrender.

Jesus returns to Peter, James, and John, the disciples who are supposed to be his moral support while in the middle of his emotional turmoil,[68] to find them asleep. In verse 40, Jesus says to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

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[66] Mathias Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels a Theological Exegesis of the Ideal Pray-er* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 60, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[67] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 672.

[68] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 671.

Jesus leaves them alone a second time and prays, in verse 42, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Jesus moves from his intrapersonal conflict to acceptance. He does not ask God to remove his suffering and death but accepts that he must drink from the cup.[69] Again, Jesus surrenders himself to God's will and purposes.

Jesus returns to his disciples and finds them sleeping again. Jesus does not wake them but goes away to pray again for a third time. And he prays the same words again: "My Father, if they cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." For a third time, Jesus returns to the disciples and says, in verse 45, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." In the garden, Jesus is arrested. He does not run, hide, or fight his arrest. There is no reluctance but acceptance as Jesus fulfills his purpose until Matthew 27:46 when he calls out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[70]

When Jesus experiences conflict, he takes it to God in prayer surrounded by his disciples. Jesus wants his companions nearby even when they could not stay awake. These three prayers are short, but they clearly express his fears, desires, and his surrender to God's purposes and plans. Through surrender, Jesus is able to put to rest his intrapersonal conflict and find the strength to continue on his journey to the cross without the troubled and sorrowed spirit that he had when he entered the garden.

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[69] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 673.

[70] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 673.

Jesus and Simon Peter

Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, are fishermen. One day they are out on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus calls out and says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." (Matthew 4:19) Immediately, the men drop their nets and become followers of Jesus Christ and a part of his twelve disciples. This is the start of a sacred relationship between Jesus and Simon Peter.

Matthew 14 tells the story of the disciples who were in a boat on the sea at night while Jesus retreats to be by himself to pray. A storm comes and batters the boat with waves and the wind is strong and carries the boat far from the land. Early in the morning, Jesus leaves the shore and walks on water to get to the boat. When the disciples see Jesus walking on the sea, they are terrified and cry out, in verse 26, "It is a ghost!" From a disciples' perspective, the seas are dangerous. Leonard Sweet writes, "Great seas of water were perceived as scenes of chaos and uncontrolled spirits."[71] Not only is there uncertainty and uncontrol lurking under the water, but there is also the fear of water creatures looking for their next victim.[72] Their fears and myths became a reality when they see a ghostly creature walking on the water toward them.

Immediately, Jesus comforts them and says, in verse 27, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." After Peter hears Jesus' words, he says to Jesus, in verse 28, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Peter is willing to step onto the dangerous waters if Jesus commands him. When Jesus tells Peter to step out of the safety

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[71] Leonard Sweet, "Stuck in the Storm," Preach the Story, August 13, 2017, https://preachthestory.com/stuck-in-the-storm/.

[72] Sweet, "Stuck in the Storm."

of the boat and into the water, Peter is obedient and starts to walk toward Jesus. While walking toward Jesus, Peter becomes distracted by the wind, fear grips him, and he begins to sink into the chaos and dangers of the sea. In verse 30, Peter cries out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" Jesus does not let Peter struggle, but immediately Jesus comes to his rescue, catches him, and says to him, in Matthew 14:32, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Jesus takes Peter to the boat, the winds calm, and the people in the boat praise Jesus and declare that he is the Son of God.

In Matthew 16:15, Jesus asks his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" In verse 16, Peter declares, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus responds by blessing Simon Peter and saying, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven…"

In John 13, Jesus washes Peters feet and then tells the disciples about his impending betrayal. Jesus wants to prepare his disciples for his death that was quickly approaching. Jesus says to them in verses 34-35, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Within two verses the phrase "love one another" or "ἀγαπᾶτε" in Greek, is stated three times. Jesus calls his disciples into mutual love which draws everyone into unity.[73] In the article "The Love Commandment," William Chang writes, "'To love one another' is characteristic of the discipleship which Jesus desires. This also means that 'to love one

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[73] William Chang, "The Love Commandment (John 13:34-35)," *The Asia Journal of Theology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 267, EBSCOhost.

another' is not only a command, but it is really a 'gift' which comes from Jesus himself, a gift that also requires 'responsibility.'"[74] Agape love is a gift. In these two verses, Jesus commands the disciples to give the gift of love to others, just as he has given them the gift of love.

After Jesus gives this command, Peter asks Jesus in verse 36, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus tells Peter that where he is going, Peter would not be able to follow. Peter, who was determined to follow him, asks, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." In verse 38, Jesus answers him and says, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times."

In John 14-16, Jesus gives his final teachings to his disciples before his arrest. Jesus reiterates his command to love. In John 15:12-13, Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." "To love one another" is a sacrificial love—a love where the "gift" is one's own life. To love is to give oneself over to another even if it means death. Afterward, Jesus prays for his disciples and they move across the Kidron valley and into a garden. It is here in this garden where Judas betrays Jesus, Peter attempts to rescue him with a sword, and then Jesus is arrested.

Peter follows Jesus to the high priest's house. In the high priest's courtyard is where Peter denies Jesus three times. All four Gospels give an account of Peter's denial: Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 18. According to Luke 22, a fire is built in the courtyard and the people sit around it. A servant-girl speaks to Peter and says, in verse

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[74] Chang, "The Love Commandment (John 13:34-35)," 268.

56, "This man also was with him." Peter makes his first denial of belonging to Jesus: "Woman, I do not know him." Time passes and a man points out that Peter is one of Jesus' disciples. But again, in verse 58, Peter denies him, "Man, I am not!" Just one hour later, another person keeps insisting that Peter is associated with Jesus, in verse 59, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." For a third time, Peter denies Jesus and says, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" A rooster crow interrupts Peter and Jesus turns to look at Peter. It is then that Peter remembers the words of Jesus earlier that day. He leaves, weeping bitterly.

Jesus and Peter shared a close relationship. If it had not have been for the forgiveness culture that Jesus cultivated, Peter's denial would have had the potential to dramatically destroy that relationship.[75] Conflict had entered Peter and Jesus' relationship. Nick Vaquilar described Peter as a "well intentioned person with the desire to do good, yet when the moment called for it, he wavered and became impulsive and unreliable."[76] Peter, the disciple who declared Jesus as the Messiah, walked on water, held the keys to the kingdom of God, and had just declared that he would lay down his life for his Messiah just hours previously publicly denied friendship and association with Jesus. Peter was unreliable, and the difficulty of the situation and the possible trouble of being associated with Jesus was cause for Peter to harm his relationship with his Rabbi. Jesus heard his own disciple's denial and, being human, recognized and felt the betrayal. In the Gospels there is no accounting for Peter's presence after he left the courtyard to

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[75] Francis J. Moloney, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 401, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[76] Nick Vaquilar, "Peter's Journey As A Disciple: An Exegetical-Theological Study of John 21:15-19," *Landas* 26, no. 2 (2012): 79, https://doi.org./10.13185/LA2012.26205.

weep. He is not mentioned when Jesus is sentenced to death or at the crucifixion. Peter and Jesus do not come face to face again until Luke 24:36 when Jesus appears in front of his disciples and declares, "Peace be with you!" and do not have a one-on-one conversation until John 21.

In John 21, Peter takes six disciples with him to fish in the Sea of Tiberias. Peter returns to his profession of casting out nets for fish. Throughout the night, they do not catch anything. The next morning someone from the shore calls out to them, in verse 5, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" When they say "no," the stranger tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. When the disciples do as instructed, they catch an abundant number of fish. They could not bring it all in. Then, the disciple Jesus loved recognizes that the stranger is Jesus and in verse 7 he cries out, "It is the Lord!"

When Peter hears who is on the shore, he gets dressed and jumps out of the boat and into the sea. The last time Peter was in the sea, he had to be saved by Jesus' outstretched arm. Peter, who knew the dangers of the sea and how quickly someone could drown, willingly jumps into the water. Peter did not let his fears dictate his faith or his actions. Instead, he jumps into the chaos and danger with the assurance that Jesus would come to his rescue in his time of need. Peter takes a step toward relationship reconciliation, or relationship repair, when he jumps into the sea. It is his expression of trust and faith in Jesus Christ.

The other disciples come in on the boat with the net full of fish. When they arrive on shore, Jesus invites the disciples to join him for breakfast. Around a charcoal fire, Peter had denied Jesus, but now he is invited to sit with Jesus and have breakfast with

him around another charcoal fire.[77] Before Jesus addresses his relationship with Peter, he

sits with him around a makeshift table, a charcoal fire, breaks bread, and shares the fish.

This meal is a symbol of reconciliation given to Peter from Jesus.[78]

John 21:15-19 is the first recorded conversation between Peter and Jesus since

their conflict began:

> When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Three times Jesus asks Peter "Do you love me?" And every time Peter declares his love.

However, when this is broken down into the original Greek language, there is more to

this story, especially pertaining to conflict. The first and second time Jesus poses the

question, "Do you love me?" Jesus uses the Greek word "ἀγαπᾷς"—an unconditional,

self-sacrificing, God sourced, love. Both times Peter responds with "φιλῶ"—the love of a

friend. This is perpetual conflict. Jesus wants Peter to love him in a way that Peter is not

able to commit to. Jesus wants the gift of sacrificial love and Peter can only respond with

friendship. Jesus does not try to force agape love on Peter or become angry with him. The

third time Jesus asks Peter, he uses the Greek word "φιλεῖς." Jesus meets Peter where he

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[77] Moloney, *Sacra Pagina,* 397.

[78] Vaquilar, "Peter's Journey as a Disciple," 88.

is and accepts the love that Peter can give. Peter responds, verse 17, "Yes Lord, you know that I φιλῶ (dearly love) you." Throughout this perpetual conflict, Jesus does not disown Peter or take away his ministry but accepts Peter's responses and still commissions him to go forth and care for Jesus' sheep.

Peter and Jesus do not offer apologies to each other. They do not sit down to discuss their feelings or go over what happened to cause the conflict. Jesus does not rebuke Peter and Peter does not defend himself or make excuses. Instead, Jesus drew Peter back into relationship. Forgiveness is extended and received without spoken apologies because Jesus has established a forgiveness culture. Forgiveness is engrained into their relationship and daily practices. Forgiveness is understood. Jesus and Peter each take steps toward reconciliation regardless of the many levels and types of conflict that take place between them. The study of John 21 shows that the Peter's denial is overcome, the relationship is restored and repaired, trust is regained, and Peter's call to ministry is renewed.[79]

Pauline Epistles

In Acts 9, Paul has an encounter with God that changes the trajectory of his life. He goes from hunting followers of Jesus Christ to a devoted believer and missionary. When Paul could not be physically present, he writes letters to congregations and other leaders. Many of the New Testament Epistles are written by Paul. This section will examine two excerpts from Paul's letters through the lens of conflict resolution.

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[79] Vaquilar, "Peter's Journey as a Disciple," 88.

Ephesians 4:1-3

It is widely believed that the Epistle of Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul while he was in a Roman prison.[80] Willard Taylor, in his commentary of Ephesians, writes:

> Paul seeks to demonstrate that the redemptive plan of God involves essentially the unity of man and the cosmos with himself. At the heart of the order of things there exists a deep rift. Man and God are tragically alienated. Likewise the world in which man lives is disunited, naturally, morally and socially. Discord is the more characteristic train of man himself and the world around him.[81]

For Paul, unity is crucial and it is through Jesus that the church will achieve it.[82] This letter is written to address unity in the church. Ephesians 4 specifically addresses unity within the body of Christ. In this part of Paul's letter, he teaches the church in Ephesus the attitudes and behaviors needed to keep unity within the fellowship of believers. The practice of these attitudes and behaviors speak into how the church today should navigate conflict.

In Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul writes, "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In these three verses, Paul tells the church they must live a worthy life, which is determined by a person's humility,

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[80] Willard H. Taylor, "Ephesians," in *Beacon Bible Commentary: Volume IX Galatians through Philemon* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry, 2011), 134, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[81] Taylor, "Ephesians," 132.

[82] Taylor, "Ephesians," 134.

gentleness, patience, love, and unity.[83] Humility is when people see themselves through

God's eyes[84] and do not allow pride, supremacy, and arrogance get in the way. Humility

is also the willingness to surrender to God's authority.[85] Gentleness is not a lack of

power, but controlled power.[86] It is also not an absence of strength, but requires a vast

amount of it.[87] Gentleness is the strength to control one's power. Patience is expectantly

waiting for God and belief that God's time, place, and action is right.[88] The love that Paul

wrote about, ἀγάπη in Greek, echoes the message Jesus gives his disciples in John 13:34,

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you,

you also should love one another." Paul instructs the people not only to love, but to "bear

with one another in love." It is easy to love when there is no suffering, pain, or difficulty

in the relationship, but to "bear with one another" means to persist, tolerate, endure, and

suffer through all circumstances.[89] Simply stated, it means to love regardless. When Paul

speaks about unity, he tells the Ephesians to make every effort to keep it. Paul wants the

believers to put forth all of their effort and to be diligent to maintain unity within the

fellowship.

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[83] Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 29, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[84] Max E. Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 140, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[85] Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,* 140.

[86] Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,* 140.

[87] Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,* 140.

[88] Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,* 140.

[89] "430. anechó," Bible Hub, accessed November 8, 2019, https://biblehub.com/greek/430.htm.

The characteristics of patience, gentleness, and persistent love yield unity.[90] To maintain unity while in conflict, a congregation must focus and put into practice these characteristics. They are crucial in conflict resolution and lead to growth, maturity, and unity. Paul knows that the opposite of these characteristics are pride, retaliation, forbearance, impatience, and competition. These characteristics will destroy the unity of the church.[91] Yet, as mentioned in previous chapters, these destroying characteristics are what most people naturally gravitate toward in the midst of conflict. These practices often escalate conflict and lead to hurt, brokenness, divisions, and, ultimately, disunity.

Colossians 3:5-17

The book of Colossians is a letter written by Paul to the church in Colossae while he was in prison.[92] In chapter three, Paul writes to the Colossians to address what it means to live a life that is shared in the resurrection of Jesus and to aspire for heavenly and not earthly things. Colossians 3:5-17 describes the characteristics that a follower of Jesus must shed and the characteristics of the resurrected life:

> Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things— anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and

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[90] Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* 140.

[91] Gundry, *Commentary on Ephesians,* 29.

[92] Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 8, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Paul begins to describe characteristics of the resurrected life by defining what people must first lose when they become followers of Jesus Christ in Colossians 3:5-11. In this section, he specifically gives two lists of sin: sexual immorality and sins of anger.[93] Churches today can prioritize one list over the other, but Paul commands the church in Colossae that neither are acceptable.[94] N.T. Wright, in his commentary on Colossians, describes the sins of anger that Paul names in Colossians 3:8:

Anger, the continuous state of smouldering or seething hatred; rage, when this state breaks out in actual angry deeds or words; malice, a word which in the Greek can simply mean 'evil', but which here probably has the overtone of 'evil extended to cause hurt'; slander, speech which puts malice into practical effort; and filthy language, words which, either by their foul association or their abusive intent, contaminate both speaker and hearers.[95]

In Colossians 3:9, Paul adds the church must rid itself of lies and dishonesty.

Anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language, and dishonesty are how people respond negatively to conflict. Michael Barram of Saint Mary's College of California writes in his commentary on this passage, "Resurrection behavior—regardless of the

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[93] N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 138, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[94] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 138.

[95] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 141-142.

circumstances—will be devoid of wrath, rage, and other vices."[96] In all circumstances, people must not fall into the temptation to commit the sins of anger. A true test of the resurrected life is how people behave in conflict circumstances. If people fall into temptation and sin in their anger, the conflict will escalate and honest communication will not take place.

In Colossians 3:12, Paul describes characteristics of the resurrected life: compassion, a sensitivity to others' needs and hurts, kindness, to have a Christlike perspective of others, humility, to have a Christlike perspective of self, meekness, and kind reaction to others.[97] Paul continues in verse 13, where he instructs the Colossians to "bear with one another," which means that they are to give permission to others to be themselves even if they are difficult and odd.[98] Then, he tells them to be a people of forgiveness. Paul knows that conflict, problems, and struggles will arise, and he wants the fellowship in Colossae to practice forgiveness.[99] Finally, Paul commands the church, above all else, to love, ἀγάπην. This love is the unity of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, and forgiveness.

In Colossians 3:15, Paul calls for peace to rule in the hearts of the Colossians. This does not mean that the church should appear to be without any conflict or hostility.[100] Rather, it means that conflict should be "dealt with at the deepest level, by all

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[96] Michael Barram, "Colossians 3:1-17," *Interpretation* 59, no. 2 (2005): 189, https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430505900210.

[97] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 146.

[98] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 146.

[99] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 146.

[100] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 148.

parties allowing the fact of their unity in Christ to settle the issue in their hearts."[101] Conflict can be peaceful when a church lives in the resurrected life and by the characteristics Paul has named.

Paul instructs in verse 16 to "teach and admonish" with wisdom that comes when the word of Christ dwells within. He also tells them, to "sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" out of gratitude. These are communal practices in which Paul encourages the church to participate. These communal practices help the church maintain and celebrate unity and will also create the atmosphere for healthy conflict resolution that seeks to keep the unity of the fellowship.

Finally, in his description of the resurrected life, he writes in verse 17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." In all circumstances, in all words, and in all action the fellowship of believers represents Jesus Christ. In conflict, the church represents Jesus Christ! Paul's words hold the church accountable for their behaviors.[102] In conflict, it is beneficial for people to ask, "How am I representing Christ with my words and actions? Do my words and actions reflect the resurrected life?"

Biblical Conflict to Today's Congregational Conflict

Thousands of years have passed since Jesus walked the earth and Paul wrote his letters, yet the lessons learned from their example and teaching are still crucial for local congregations today. Through the stories of Jesus and writings of Paul, the fellowship of

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[101] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 148.

[102] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 150.

believers can discover how to navigate conflict in ways that honor and glorify God. How the church manages conflict can be an act of worship and a gift of love.

Conflict was a regular part of Jesus' life and ministry. He experienced conflict with friends, family, ministry leaders, and his enemies. When in conflict, Jesus would determine who he was in conflict with, the desired outcome for the situation, and the best method for conflict resolution. There were many different outcomes to Jesus' conflicts: win-win, lose-lose, and win-lose, but they were the best outcomes for each conflict situation.

For Jesus, conflict was not a problem but an opportunity that he used for teaching. He took advantage of the conflict to instruct others, even his enemies. Jesus was always truthful in his communication. He did not hold back from difficult truths, but he conducted himself with truthfulness, gentleness, and merciful justice. Jesus created a forgiveness culture within his followers that created the possibility for conflict to be dealt with in constructive methods.

When Jesus encountered conflict he did not try to manage the situation. The dictionary defines manage as, "to work upon or try to alter for a purpose," "to handle or direct with a degree of skill," and "to make and keep compliant."[103] It has a top-down, administrative connotation to it that seeks control for outcomes that produce the right commodities. Instead, Jesus prioritized the people and His Kingdom. He did not manage conflict but worked towards resolution. He resolved the conflict in methods that honored relationship. In the church conflict should not be managed, but congregational members

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[103] "Resolution," Merriam-Webster, accessed March 8, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resolution.

should journey together, even if the road is rocky, towards resolution that prioritizes relationship.

Paul, a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, writes letters to different congregations filled with encouragement, teaching, and instruction. Unity within the congregation is an essential theme in Paul's letters. When a local church strives to keep the unity of the Spirit, they will solve conflict in healthy and constructive ways. Paul also makes it clear that regardless of the situation or the conflict, disciples of Jesus Christ should conduct themselves in ways that reflect the resurrected life of their Savior.

Churches must learn how to apply the lessons learned about conflict resolution from Jesus and Paul in today's conflicted congregations. The next chapter will explore different practices that local congregations can engage in to help navigate churches to healthy and constructive conflict resolution. These practices reflect and honor the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus and align with the writings of Paul.

CHAPTER 6:

BE PREPARED

"Be Prepared" is the motto for the Boy Scouts of America (BSA),[1] a scouting

program for children with the goal to teach them how to make moral and ethical choices

throughout their lives.[2] It is a motto the church should embrace when it comes to conflict

within the church so that congregational members can be prepared to make a healthy

choice when, not if, they encounter conflict. There is not a way to escape conflict, but the

church can prepare for it.

The previous chapters of this dissertation explored conflict management from the

perspective of Christian leaders, businesses, marriage counselors, and Scripture. Even

though there are many successful ways to work through conflict, they all boil down to

one issue: people have to make their own choice on how to handle conflict. People can be

given all the skills and information, attend trainings, and become well educated on

healthy conflict resolution, but they still have to decide on how they will respond when

conflict happens. People will either choose a constructive approach or a deconstructive

approach to conflict. If pastors and ministry leaders want congregational members to

constructively resolve conflict then they must help them decide to make wise choices.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together,* writes:

The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will
everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ
and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one

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[1] "The Adventures of a Well-Traveled Scout Pack," Boy Scouts of America, April 5, 2016, https://www.scouting.org/cubhub/well-traveled-scout-pack/.

[2] "Scouting Is Adventure, Family, Fun, Character, Leadership and So Much More," Boy Scouts of America, accessed October 26, 2020, https://www.scouting.org/.

another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for all eternity.[3]

Strong bonds of community are crucial and influential when people decide on how they will resolve conflict. In church communities, where there are deep communal connections, conflict, hurt, and anger will recede. The conflict becomes less important than Jesus and his work in the world.

To build relationships that reinforce community, pastors and ministry leaders need to engage their church in corporate spiritual disciplines, table fellowship, and play. This final chapter will examine these three congregational practices, how to help prepare people for conflict, and how to choose conflict resolution methods that preserve unity within the body of Christ.

Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines are channels that lead to God's grace and guide people to a place where God can work in their lives.[4] They are practices that direct people to the opportunity for spiritual growth.[5] Examples of spiritual disciplines are submission, solitude, simplicity, confession, celebration, guidance, meditation, study, prayer, and fasting.[6] Donald S. Whitney has over 24 years in pastoral ministry and serves as a Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean at The Southern Baptist Theological

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[3] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Munich: SCM Press Ltd., 1949), chap. 1, Kindle.

[4] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: A Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 7.

[5] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), chap. 1, Kindle.

[6] Richard J. Foster, "Becoming Like Christ," Renovaré, accessed October 26, 2020, https://renovare.org/articles/becoming-like-christ.

Seminary.[7] He divides spiritual disciplines into two categories: personal and interpersonal.[8] Personal spiritual disciplines are to be practiced alone and include Scripture reading, Bible study, fasting, and journaling. Interpersonal disciplines are to be practiced with others such as corporate worship or group Bible studies.[9] These interpersonal disciplines not only draw the church closer to God but closer to each other—they build the community bonds that can help lead people to preserve unity in the midst of conflict.

Richard Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* and founder of Renovaré,[10] a ministry focused on church growth, divides the spiritual disciplines into three categories: inward, outward, and corporate.[11] Outward disciplines "cultivate our appetites toward the way of Christ"; inward disciplines "cultivate our heart and mind toward the way of Christ"; and corporate disciplines "cultivate our affections toward the way of Christ."[12] Corporate disciplines draw the body of Christ to one another and to God,[13] which helps the church stand united when practiced together.

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[7] "Donald S. Whitney," The Southern Bapstist Theological Seminary, accessed October 28, 20202, https://www.sbts.edu/academics/faculty/donald-s-whitney/.

[8] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life,* chap. 1.

[9] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life,* chap. 1.

[10] "Richard J. Foster," Renovaré, accessed October 26, 2020, https://renovare.org/people/richard-foster/bio.

[11] Foster, "Becoming Like Christ."

[12] Foster, "Becoming Like Christ."

[13] "Celebration of Discipline," Renovaré, accessed October 26, 2020, https://renovare.org/books/celebration-of-discipline.

For Whitney, the spiritual discipline of worship is categorized as both personal and interpersonal,[14] but Foster names it as corporate: "to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community."[15] Worship requires a person to offer their entire being as an act of love toward God; the voice through song, the body through posture, and the spirit through prayer.[16] Thomas R. Kelly, an American Quaker missionary, speaker, author, and educator, writes: "This fellowship in worship is not just an earthly reciprocal fellowship, but a fellowship wherein we pass beyond our separate selves into unity with that one Self, whom to know is life indeed."[17] Corporate worship unifies the fellowship of believers. In worship, the separate lives of the congregational members are left behind and fellowship is unified with one another and the Triune God.

Corporate worship is not only an expression of unity, but also leads the fellowship into unity. However, conflict between congregational members too often permeates the sanctuary on Sunday mornings. Corporate worship is intended to gather the church together and celebrate unity, but churches that meet weekly for worship still splinter and divide. One of the reasons for this conflict is consumerism. This has plagued our worship and allowed conflict to result in divisiveness and disunity in fellowship.

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[14] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life,* chap. 1.

[15] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline,* 158.

[16] "Spiritual Disciples: A Practical Strategy," Renovaré, accessed October 26, 2020, https://renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-disciplines.

[17] Thomas R. Kelly, *The Eternal Promise* (Richmond, IN: Harper & Row, 1966), part 1, Kindle.

The Plague of Consumerism

Peter Block, author and founder of Designed Learning; Walter Brueggemann, author, Old Testament scholar, and Professor Emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary; and John McKnight, who trained Barack Obama in community organization and is co-founder of Asset-Based Community Development Institute at DePaul University, wrote the book *An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture.* Through their research and analysis, they have named the American economic society as "the free market consumer ideology." To understand their critique, it is essential to break down the meaning of this name. "Free" means the promotion and elevation of self and individual rights with little constraints on people and institutions.[18] "Market" signifies a worldview of buying and selling where commerce is the first priority.[19] "Consumer" means that a person's identity and well-being are determined by their ability to purchase and the desire for more and more.[20] "Ideology" is that the beliefs of the Free, the Market, and the Consumer are true.[21] There are four pillars on which the free market consumer ideology stands: scarcity, certainty, perfection, and privatization.[22] They write,

> These are much more than a set of beliefs about an economy. These consumer market concepts shape and commodify the social order. They define our culture. This narrative is a lens through which we raise our children, tell the news, create our livelihood, label who is in and out, distribute empire, and define how we live.

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[18] Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann, and John McKnight, *An Other Kingdom: Departing The Consumer Culture,* (Hoboken; John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), XVII, Wiley Online Library.

[19] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*, XVII.

[20] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*, XVII.

[21] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*, XVII.

[22] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*, 1.

It identifies what really matters in the end and establishes the nature of our social relationships.[23]

The free market consumer ideology affects every aspect of life: relationships, workplace, power, status, education, decisions, and behaviors. Since the free market consumer ideology is a lens through which people view the world, it has a great impact on the life of local church congregations.

William T. Cavanaugh is a Professor of Catholic Studies at DePaul University, the Director of the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Studies, and an expert in ecclesiology and political theology. For Cavanaugh, the issue with consumerism is detachment:

> In the Christian tradition, detachment from material goods means using them as a means to a greater end, and the greater end is greater attachment to God and to our fellow human beings. In consumerism, detachment means standing back from all the people, times, and places, and appropriating choices for private use. Consumerism supports an essentially individualistic view of the human person, in which each consumer is a sovereign chooser.[24]

In local congregations, consumerism causes people to detach themselves from the body of Christ, which results in isolation and independence from others. When a person becomes a "sovereign chooser," they dethrone God to become their own authority and can no longer look at other members in the fellowship of believers as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Consumerism has had a profound effect on liturgy and corporate worship. Consumerism has turned pastors into producers and laity into consumers.[25] Liturgy is

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[23] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*, XVIII.

[24] William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), chap. 2., Kindle.

[25] Christopher Kiesling, "Liturgy and Consumerism," *Worship* 52, no. 4 (1978): 366, ATLAS.

objectified and becomes a product produced by clergy for congregational members to receive.[26] Father Christopher Kiesling, a professor at the Aquinas Institute of Theology, writes that because of consumerism "worship is more like the payment of an insurance premium than an expression of faith and love toward a Beloved who calls and responds."[27] A consumeristic perspective prevents people from being able to give and surrender themselves to God in worship because they are too occupied with what the return will be for attendance and participation.[28] This has caused people to become self-focused and not a unified body of Christ, which makes conflict resolution about what the self can get out of the conflict, without consideration for others or even the Triune God. Through the lens of consumerism, conflict, like worship, becomes a transaction and an obsession to gain more and more. Healthy and constructive conflict resolution, just like healthy and loving praise, cannot take place in consumeristic worship services.

The Return of Intentional Corporate Worship

Unity cannot be realized or celebrated in consumerist worship because the byproducts of consumerism are independence, competition, feuds, strife, envy, grudges, and war.[29] Unity and consumerism cannot coexist. If local churches want to live in unity and manage conflict in healthy ways, it must reclaim the true intention behind the spiritual discipline of corporate worship. There are several elements to corporate worship

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[26] Kiesling, "Liturgy and Consumerism," 365.

[27] Kiesling, "Liturgy and Consumerism," 366.

[28] Kiesling, "Liturgy and Consumerism," 368.

[29] Timothy Brunk, *The Sacraments and Consumer Culture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2020), chap. 3, Kindle.

that need to be redefined and rediscovered: Scripture reading, silence, singing, and communion.

Corporate Scripture Reading. Scripture was not a book given to humanity that is to be left on a shelf. Scripture is the Word of God given to creation as the main way God has chosen to reveal Godself.[30] The Old Testament and New Testament, especially the Torah and Gospels, were created with the intention of being read aloud.[31] Scripture reading was an important part of corporate worship in the Old and New Testaments, but this is no longer a common practice in current corporate worship in evangelical congregations. Too often, Scripture is not given a prominent place in worship. Instead, Scriptures are used to set up the sermon or a few verses are sandwiched between two songs. There is the fear that the reading aloud of Scripture will cause the service to lose its momentum, slow the pace, or be too boring for the congregational members.[32]

The main way that God has chosen to reveal Godself is through Scripture,[33] and Scripture is an invitation to worship that gives reason for people to respond in worship.[34] Songs and sermons will come and go, but the Word of God is everlasting. When Scripture is read aloud in the church, it is a reminder that worship is a response to God

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[30] Daniel I. Block, "'That They May Hear': Biblical Foundations for the Oral Reading of Scripture in Worship," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 5, https://doi.org/10.1177/193979091200500102

[31] Dirk Monshouwer, "The Reading of the Scriptures in the Liturgy: A Neglected Approach to Biblical Interpretation," *Communio Viatorum* 41, no. 2 (1999): 116, ATLAS.

[32] H. Wayne Johnson, "Practicing Theology on a Sunday Morning: Corporate Worship as Spiritual Formation," *Trinity Journal* 31, no. 1 (2010): 37. ATLAS.

[33] Block, "That They May Hear," 5.

[34] Johnson, "Practicing Theology on a Sunday Morning."

and not initiated by people. Scripture fights consumerism because it reprioritizes God and helps push away self-centeredness.

Local congregations that want to break through consumerism need to incorporate the public reading of the Bible. N. T. Wright, in an introduction to an online class for public reading of Scriptures, says, "The Scriptures were never intended simply as reference points for private individuals, though of course they are that as well, they form and shape whole communities. Part of what it means to be the people of God is to be the people, who together, listen to the great story, the God given story, of God Himself and his world."[35] Although the Scriptures are important in personal spiritual growth, they were intended for the development of the communal faith. The church, a fellowship of believers, must learn to engage in the Bible and listen to the story of God, because this great story will form and shape the community. Consumerism is defeated through the Scriptures because it draws us back to the story of God and not profit, gain, or self. The Word of God is essential to Christian worship and needs to be reclaimed in corporate worship.

Corporate Silence. Silence describes Quaker corporate worship. There is not a pastor or elder that plans songs, Scripture readings, responsive readings, sermons, or benedictions. The congregation comes together and sits in silence. They expectantly wait for the voice of God that often cannot be heard because of the noise of life.[36] They

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[35] "Reading Scripture in Public," N.T. Wright Online, accessed October 26, 2020, https://ntwrightonline.org/portfolio-items/reading-scripture-public/.

[36] Marsha D. Holliday, "Silent Worship and Quaker Values," Friends General Conference, June 11, 2012, https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/silent-worship-and-quaker-values.

practice Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God."[37] At some point, a member of the congregation may share a message, testimony, or Scripture as led by the Holy Spirit.[38] Kelly says,

> A blanket of divine covering comes over the room, a stillness that can be felt is over all, and the worshipers are gathered into unity and the synthesis of life which is amazing indeed. A quaking Presence pervades us, breaking down some part of the special privacy and isolation of our individual lives and blending our spirits within a super individual Life and Power.[39]

As consumerism causes worship to focus on self and production, corporate silence, as Kelly describes, lends the possibility for people's lives to connect and create unity with each other and the Holy Spirit. When people expectantly wait in silence for God to speak, the focus moves away from self, quality, or production and onto God. In expectant corporate silence, selfishness decreases and unity increases because God becomes the focus.

Corporate Singing. Music in worship can cause significant and combative conflict in the church. There are arguments over which instruments and songs to include or exclude in worship.[40] In the 1990s, this conflict created a dichotomy between "traditional" and "contemporary" worship within the Church universal and local congregations.[41] However, corporate singing is vital to the health of congregations. Psalm

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[37] Holliday, "Silent Worship and Quaker Values,"

[38] Holliday, "Silent Worship and Quaker Values,"

[39] Kelly, *The Eternal Promise,* part 2.

[40] Lester Ruth, "The Eruption of Worship Wars: The Coming of Conflict," *Liturgy,* 32, no 1 (November 7, 2016): 3, https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2016.1229431.

[41] Ruth, "The Eruption of Worship Wars," 3.

149:1 says, "Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of saints." The psalmist gives a clear directive to the spiritual discipline of corporate singing.[42]

When congregations sing together, the diverse voices of individuals combine to form one voice—the voice of the church.[43] Lost is the voice of "me," but what remains is the beautiful voice of "we," the church, who share in one song.[44] Richard Foster writes, "Our fragmented minds and spirits flow into a unified whole."[45] In corporate worship and singing, "we join the voice of the church, all the saints, both the great cloud of witnesses and those who are still on earth, praising, thanking, and praying to God in unity."[46] When the church sings together, it joins all creation and all the heavens in a united praise song to God.

Corporate worship reminds the congregation that the individualism mindset created by a consumerist society is not definitive, but that they can live and worship in unity.[47] Keith and Kristyn Getty are modern hymn writers and authors who write, "We are reminded that we are not the center of the universe, but just one voice and heart among the great worldwide throng of people praising the One who is. And we remind each other of all of this as we sing together."[48] Corporate singing brings the focus back to

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[42] Keith Getty and Kristyn Getty, *Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church,* (Nashville: B & H Publishiing Group, 2017), chap. 2, Kindle.

[43] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* chap 2.

[44] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, chap 2.

[45] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline,*169.

[46] Jon Walker, *In Visible Fellowship: A Contemporary View of Bonhoeffer's Classic Work Life Together* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2011), 58.

[47] Getty and Getty, *Sing!*, chap. 6.

[48] Getty and Getty, *Sing!*, chap. 6.

God and away from self-gain and self-praise. Through one voice, one song, and one focus, the congregation becomes a united oneness.

Kenny Lamm has served as a worship leader for 23 years and is now a consultant for worship. In the article "9 Reasons People Aren't Singing in Worship," Lamm offers practical advice to encourage corporate singing. He expresses the importance to select songs that are intended for congregational singing, that are known by the people, and are in the musical ranges that average people can sing.[49] In this article, Lamm addresses the issue of the environment of the sanctuary in regards to lights, media, and the arts, which, when overdone or poorly done, can create a performance or spectator event that does not invite the church to sing together.[50] Also, Lamm discusses the important role leadership plays in congregational singing. It is crucial for leaders to not get so caught up in the production of a service that they forget the importance of being authentic and invitational, so people know they are welcome to join the voice of the church.[51] Through these practical steps, the church fights against consumerism and creates a sacred time and space for the congregation to sing together as an expression of their unity.

Eucharist. The culture of consumerism in our society today can cause the spiritual discipline and sacrament of communion to be misinterpreted and incorrectly promote individualism.[52] Easily, the body and blood of Jesus can become a product or an

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[49] Kenny Lamm, "Nine Reasons People Aren't Singing in Church," Renewing Worship, accessed October 26, 2020, https://www.renewingworshipnc.org/nine-reasons-people-arent-singing-in-worship/.

[50] Lamm, "Nine Reasons People Aren't Singing in Church."

[51] Lamm, "Nine Reasons People Aren't Singing in Church."

[52] Brunk, *The Sacraments and Consumer Culture,* chap. 3.

asset used to the good of an individual person.[53] When Eucharist is understood through the terms of "assets," then it becomes a transaction: "I come. I eat. I drink. I am forgiven."

In private interviews conducted within a local church, congregants were asked, "Do you understand Eucharist to be a celebration of unity?" Several people answered with a simple yes. One congregant was more adamant and said, "Yes, more than any [other] single act." Others congregational members did not see the connection between unity and the Eucharist. One person responded, "Communion is a personal thing. I don't think about my relationship with others at all." Another said, "First image: me and Christ. Second: unity with others globally, not locally." Several congregational members answered similarly. These interviews revealed that there is a large portion of congregational members who do not understand that, as editor, author, and pastor Jon Walker says, "Our communion with Christ should compel us into communion with each other."[54]

Followers of Jesus Christ need to reclaim the true intention and meaning of the Eucharist and step away from the influence of consumerism. One step a church can take to step away from this influence is to have strong teachings and liturgy that direct people to the truth that Eucharist is not a commodity.[55] The body and blood of Jesus Christ are

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[53] Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed,* chap. 2.

[54] Walker, *In Visible Fellowship,* 172.

[55] Brunk, *The Sacraments and Consumer Culture,* chap. 3.

not materials, goods, or products to be traded or exchanged for other goods or profit.

Rather, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, represented in the bread and juice, are a gift.[56]

Gifts are a way in which connections are built.[57] A study on the difference

between the gift of a material item and an experience showed that relationships grow

more through the gift of experience.[58] Researchers on this project, Cindy Chan and

Cassie Mogilner, write, "The benefits of acquiring an experience over a possession stem

from the fact that experiences are more likely to be shared with others, contribute more to

one's sense of self, are more unique, and are harder to compare against alternatives."[59]

Eucharist is a gift of experience that draws us closer to God and others. When

congregants receive this gift together, it invites[60] and builds relationships.

In 1979, the Episcopal Church edited the Eucharist liturgy in the *Book of Common*

Prayer to include the phrase "the gifts of God for the people of God."[61] This was to be

said before the minister administered the bread and juice to the congregation. This change

in liturgy clearly reminds people that the communion bread and juice are a gift freely

given to God's children.

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[56] Brunk, *The Sacraments and Consumer Culture,* chap 3.

[57] Cindy Chan and Cassie Mogilner, "Experiential Gifts Foster Stronger Social Relationships Than Material Gifts," *Journal of Consumer Research* 43, no. 6 (2017): 913, https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucw067.

[58] Chan and Mogilner, "Experiential Gifts Foster Stronger Social Relationships Than Material Gifts," 927.

[59] Chan and Mogilner, "Experiential Gifts Foster Stronger Social Relationships Than Material Gifts," 914.

[60] Brunk, *The Sacraments and Consumer Culture,* chap. 3.

[61] "Sancta Sanctis," An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church, Episcopal Church, accessed October 26, 2020, https://episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/sancta-sanctis.

A year after the Book of Common Prayer was revised, Pope John Paul II, on February 24, 1980, wrote a letter to the Bishops in the Roman Catholic Church about the worship and mystery of Communion. In this letter he writes,

> We cannot, even for a moment, forget that the Eucharist is a special possession belonging to the whole Church. It is the greatest gift in the order of grace and of sacrament that the divine Spouse has offered and unceasingly offers to His spouse. And precisely because it is such a gift, all of us should in a spirit of profound faith let ourselves be guided by a sense of truly Christian responsibility. A gift obliges us ever more profoundly because it speaks to us not so much with the force of a strict right as with the force of personal confidence, and thus— without legal obligations—it calls for trust and gratitude. The Eucharist is just such a gift and such a possession. We should remain faithful in every detail to what it expresses in itself and to what it asks of us, namely, thanksgiving.[62]

This letter was a reminder that the Eucharist is the greatest gift. When communion is received as a gift, the people are called to respond with gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise. When congregations give praise to God for the gift of the Eucharist, the focus moves away from "me" to "you." Eucharist, when seen as a commodity, promotes self-praise and glorification, but as a gift, the praise and glory is redirected to the giver.

Another way that congregations can combat consumerism during Eucharist is to make sure that the nonverbal communication reflects right theology. It is crucial for leaders and pastors to know what is being communicated through the methods the juice and bread are being served and received. For example, a nonverbal theological statement is being made when congregations distribute small, precut wafers. This does not

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[62] "Letter *Dominica Cena* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to All the Bishops of the Church on the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist," Vatican, accessed October 26, 2020, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19800224_dominicae-cenae.html.

communicate a theology of unity within the church, but promotes individualism.[63] Communion unites us with Christ, which in return unites the body of Christ,[64] which is communicated through the use of the common loaf, where people come forward and tear a of piece of bread from the same loaf as their brothers and sisters.[65] Dennis C. Smolarski, Catholic Priest and a Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science at Santa Clara University, writes, "The one loaf binds people around a table together as a family by engaging each person in the action of sharing food from that common loaf."[66]

Communion is a sacred time and communal practice in corporate worship. Jon Walker writes, "Communion is about the sharing of life. It is about knowing others and being known by others, about caring and being cared for on a deep and personal level. And, when we take communion together, we should reflect the life we share with one another because the Life of Christ is active in our hearts."[67] When congregations intentionally partake in true Eucharist together, it is a celebration of the body of Christ that shares in life together and overcomes the consumerism and individualism that pervade our culture.

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[63] Russell Moore, "Family Supper: Reclaiming Community Through Communion," Desiring God, July 23, 2012, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/family-supper-reclaiming-community-through-communion.

[64] Fr. Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy* (Chicago: Orthodox Witness, 2010), 337.

[65] Lamm, "Nine Reasons People Aren't Singing in Church."

[66] Dennis C. Smolarski, *Eucharist and American Culture: Liturgy, Unity, and Individualism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010), chap. 6, Kindle.

[67] Walker, *In Visible Fellowship,* 171.

Away from Consumerism and Toward Unity With Spiritual Disciplines

Churches that want to manage healthy conflict will push against consumerism and fight to reclaim corporate worship. When corporate worship is done with its true intent, the voice of "us" rises about the voice of "me." When this happens, people will want to manage conflict in ways that preserve "us" and will work for the greater of the Body of Christ rather than personal gain or opinion. United worship will result in conflict resolution that honors, respects, and cherishes the unity of the congregation.

Fellowship

Fellowship is overused and underdefined in church life.[68] The New Testament word for fellowship is *koinonia*, but *koinonia* requires more than one English word to understand it to its full meaning. Throughout the New Testament, *koinonia* can mean communion, being together, common grounds, sharing, participation, and fellowship.[69] *Koinonia* represents relationship: relationship between the Triune God, relationship between people and God, and relationship between God's people.[70]

Fellowship, simply defined, means "life together."[71] Consumerism, as previously discussed, has forced the church to reduce fellowship to a one-hour compacted service once a week and maybe a mid-week service. This, however, does not achieve the call for

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[68] Douglas Mangum, "Koinonia: What the Bible Means by 'Fellowship,'" Bidble Study Tools, March 5, 2014, https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/koinonia-what-the-bible-means-by-followship.html.

[69] Miika Ahola, "The Unity We Have Not Found: The Ontology of Relation in Koinonia," *The Ecumenical Review* 70 (3): 476, https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12376.

[70] Ahola, "The Unity We Have Not Fount," 477.

[71] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* chap. 1.

fellowship within the body of Christ.[72] Local churches have cheapened fellowship by making it focused around events and social gatherings. True fellowship is centered around relationship and life together that draws us into participation with God and others.

True fellowship can help congregations prepare for conflict and have the desire to work through it with constructive methods. Fellowship—participation with God and others—will lead people to want to preserve relationships, which requires healthy conflict resolution. It is time for the church to deepen the practice of fellowship through family meals and play.

Family Meals

Dr. Kara Powell and Dr. Chap Clark conducted a study through Fuller Seminary called Sticky Faith. This study was done to understand why teenagers are leaving the church after high school graduation. The Search Institute surveyed 11,000 teenagers from 562 local churches in six denominations. This survey revealed that "12% of youth have a regular dialogue with their mom on faith and life issues."[73] For fathers, the number drops to 5%.[74] Teenagers need quality conversations. Time and space needs to be carved out of the day so that this can happen.[75] Meal time is the perfect place for these conversations.

A survey done by the restaurant Red Robin revealed that "70% of parents wish they had more time to connect to their children, and 73% of children wish they had more

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[72] John R. Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 87, Ebook Central.

[73] Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), chap. 4, Kindle.

[74] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith,* chap. 4.

[75] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith,* chap. 4.

time to connect to their parents."[76] This desire for connection has brought back the need

for mealtimes in families.[77] The resurgence of family mealtimes has positive effects on

the family. First, a regular mealtime provides a time for family communication and offers

stability and structure to family life.[78] Families that eat together on a regular basis help

children become "well adjusted." It helps them make healthy choices that fight against

depression, drug usage, poor academic performance, eating disorders, suicide, early

sexual encounters, problem behaviors,[79] low self-esteem, stress, and anxiety.[80] Healthy

families that connect relationally eat meals together frequently.

Dr. Gary Chapman, in his book *The 5 Love Languages*, named five ways people

receive and give love: words of affirmation, physical touch, acts of service, gift

giving/receiving, and quality time.[81] There is a movement of people, like Immaculate

Zinde with *Food For Mzansi*[82] and Brooke Sager with SheKnows, who believe there is a

sixth love language—food. Dr. Patrick Wanis, a human behavior and relationship expert,

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[76] "New Red Robin Survey Reveals 73% of Children Wish They Had More Time to Connect With Their Family," *PR Newswire*, July 24, 2019, ProQuest Central.

[77] Kelly Musick and Ann Meier, "Assessing Causality and Persistence in Associations Between Family Dinners and Adolescent Well-Being," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74, no. 3 (June 2, 2012): 476, http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00973.x.

[78] Bisakha Sen, "The Relationship between Frequency of Family Dinner and Adolescent Problem Behaviors after Adjusting for Other Family Characteristics," *Journal of Adolescence* 33, no. 1 (2010): 187, http://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.03.011.

[79] Sen, "The Relationship between Frequency of Family Dinner and Adolescent Problem Behaviors after Adjusting for Other Family Characteristics," 187-188.

[80] Anne K. Fishel, "Harnessing the Power of Family Dinners to Create Change in Family Therapy," *Austrualian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* 37, no. 4 (2016): 514, https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1185.

[81] "The 5 Love Languages," accessed October 26, 2020, https://www.5lovelanguages.com/5-love-languages/.

[82] Immaculate Zinde, "Why the Sixth Love Language Could Actually be Food," Food for Mzansi, February 4, 2019, https://www.foodformzansi.co.za/why-the-sixth-love-language-could-actually-be-food/.

says, "Food incorporates all the other five languages and all five senses. It's a very

powerful way of creating a connection and expressing love."[83] Around the dinner table

where dinner is shared, relationships, intimacy, and love grow and the family is formed.

Community Meals

In 2000, six residents from the Seminole Heights neighborhood in Tampa Bay,

Florida gathered one Wednesday night to share cornbread, chili, and conversation.[84] That

night birthed "Family Dinner Night." As of 2012, this neighborhood had shared 664

consecutive Wednesday meals together. The average weekly attendance for the meal is

30 to 45 neighbors but has gone as high as 100 people.[85] Every neighbor contributes what

they can to the meal and the location is shared between the homes of four different

families. The dinners typically span two hours, but on special occasions can last for

twelve hours.[86] In 2013, David Purnell, a doctoral student at the University of South

Florida, partnered with J. Jacob Jenkins, an Associate Professor at California State

University Channel Islands, to study and learn from the "Family Dinner Night." They

write:

> Family Dinner Night serves as an oasis during the middle of an otherwise hectic
> week, a time to reconnect, relax, discuss, debate, and laugh together. Family
> Dinner Night is also the only time that some residents of the Seminole Heights
> area have an opportunity to share in the same activity as their neighbors. As

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[83] Brooke Sager, "Food is the Love Language that Shapes My Relationships," She Knows, January 29, 2020, https://www.sheknows.com/food-and-recipes/articles/2148218/food-love-language/.

[84] David Purnell and J. Jacob Jenkins, "Breaking Bread, Creating Community: Food's Ability to Increase Communal Ties and Relationships," *Florida Communication Journal* 41, no. 1 (2013): 75, EBSCOhost.

[85] Purnell and Jenkins, "Breaking Bread, Creating Community."

[86] Purnell and Jenkins, "Breaking Bread, Creating Community," 76.

knowledge of each other grows through the communal act of a sit-down dinner, so too do the bonds of friendship and community.[87]

Relationships between neighbors was cultivated at the dinner table. It was a sacred time for people to pause, share a meal together, and engage in conversation. Purnell and Jenkins, after 12 years of observation and participation, noticed that one of the major themes of the weekly meal was storytelling. Over food, stories were shared that gave praises to others at the table, communicated knowledge about themselves to others, created communal laughter, and helped create an atmosphere where people desired to know one another rather than impress each other.[88] Shared stories around a shared meal transformed neighbors into family.[89]

Churches that Eat Together

As families and communities thrive from regular mealtimes, the same could be said for the body of Christ. As discussed earlier, the Eucharist is a time that the church remembers and celebrates the unity of the Triune God, personal unity with God, and the unity of the body of Christ with the Triune God. Leonard Sweet, in his book *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed*, argues that the "The communion table in the sanctuary, and the table of communion in the fellowship hall—both are the Lord's tables that turn the tables on real human concerns."[90] There should be as much emphasis on the fellowship table as there is on the Eucharist table in the local

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[87] Purnell and Jenkins, "Breaking Bread, Creating Community," 76.

[88] Purnell and Jenkins, "Breaking Bread, Creating Community," 79.

[89] Purnell and Jenkins, "Breaking Bread, Creating Community," 79.

[90] Sweet, *From Tablet to Table*, 108.

church. The body of Christ needs to gather around the table and share a meal together. This is where relationships are grown and familiar attachments develop.

It is around the table, over a shared meal, where conflict should be handled. Conflict managed around the table will decrease the possibility of it escalating into a fight[91] and encourages forgiveness.[92] Relationships within the church will experience conflict and hurt, but the best way to bring reconciliation and healing is to dine together at the table. Leonard Sweet writes, "The secret of a loving, forgiving church is to commune before you argue. In feeding you, I forgive you."[93] If the church wants to handle conflict in constructive ways, the church must create a culture of forgiveness and love, which means that the church must see the fellowship table as a sacred time and place.

To prepare members of the congregation for conflict and create a pathway for healthy conflict resolution, the church must rediscover the fellowship table. People cherish and respect the stories, relationships, connections, and bonds that are created around the table and as a result will handle conflicts in way that preserves what happens around the table. The desire to preserve and protect helps prevent conflict avoidance, slander, rage, violence, gossip, and other negative behaviors that lead to the breakdown of relationships. Eating together sets the table for healthy conflict resolution in the body of Christ.

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[91] Sweet, *From Tablet to Table*, 124.

[92] Sweet, *From Tablet to Table*, 125.

[93] Sweet, *From Tablet to Table*, 125.

Play

Play and Brain Development

Human brains are developed through experiences, relationships, and interactions with others.[94] The brain can be separated into two categories: the upstairs brain and the downstairs brain. The downstairs brain is the brain stem and the limbic system, including the amygdala. From the time of birth, a child's downstairs brain is mostly wired, which allows them to sleep, eat, drink, eliminate wastes, and regulate body temperature.[95] The downstairs brain is responsible for strong emotions, like fear and anger, and for impulses reactions.[96] One important part of the downstairs brain is the amygdala. It is about the size of an almond, but is the watchdog of the brain that is always active and working to protect the body from any threats. When danger is detected, the amygdala allows people to act before they think, as a safety precaution.[97]

The upstairs part of the brain is mostly comprised of the cortex, which is divided into two hemispheres known as the left and right hemispheres.[98] The upstairs brain is not wired at birth but is developed through time and experiences, and it will not be fully

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[94] Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, "Children from Hard Places and the Brain: Chapter 1," YouTube video, 11:51, January 13, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak6z3pqNqFU.

[95] Empower to Connect Conference, hosted by Pathway Family Services, Inc., First Baptist Church, Santa Maria, CA, April 26-27, 2019.

[96] Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child* (New York: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks, 2011), 39.

[97] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child*, 42.

[98] Empower to Connect Conference, hosted by Pathway Family Services, Inc., First Baptist Church, Santa Maria, CA, April 26-27, 2019.

developed until a person reaches their mid-twenties.[99] This part of the brain allows people to learn, reason, think, remember, and regulate emotions.[100]

The goal in brain health and development is for the upstairs and downstairs brain to be vertically integrated.[101] When the downstairs brain has strong reactions, emotions, or impulses, the upstairs brain can calm it and help work through the triggers. The upstairs brain also needs the input from the downstairs brain about instincts, emotions, and the body before making decisions.[102] Both parts of the brain need to work together for people to make healthy and wise decisions. However, not every person has a fully developed and healthy brain.

Trauma affects brain growth and development. When a child has experienced trauma or has been overwhelmed by stress, the brain will trigger the amygdala, the downstairs brain, and go into "survival mode," where the only response a child has is fight, flight, or freeze.[103] Repetitive trauma that has triggered "survival mode" too often causes the brain to reorganize, and the amygdala will become overdeveloped.[104] This causes children to be unable to use their upstairs brain to regulate emotion, think clearly and logically, and deal with a stressful situation.

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[99] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child*, 41.

[100] Empower to Connect Conference, hosted by Pathway Family Services, Inc., First Baptist Church, Santa Maria, CA, April 26-27, 2019.

[101] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child*, 40.

[102] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child*, 41.

[103] Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, "Children from Hard Places and the Brain: Chapter 1."

[104] Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, "Children from Hard Places and the Brain: Chapter 1."

The human brain is comprised of over one hundred billion neurons, and each neuron has approximately ten thousand connections to other neurons. Dr. Daniel Siegel has devoted his life to the well-being of others through healthy minds. He is a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine who helped create and co-directed the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, and he is the executive director at the Mindsight Institute. Dr. Tiny Payne Bryon is an adolescent and pediatric psychotherapist and is the Director of Parenting for the Mindsight Institute. Together, Siegel and Bryon wrote the book, *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind.* In the book, they explain:

> When neurons fire together, they grow new connections between them. Over time, the connections that result from firing lead to "rewiring" in the brain. This is incredibly exciting news. It means that we aren't held captive for the rest of our lives by the way our brain works at this moment—we can actually rewire it so that we can be healthier and happier. This is true not only for children and adolescents, but also for each of us across the life span.[105]

The brain is an incredible organ. The brain is not static but is capable of development for people of all ages. The saying "You can't teach old dogs new tricks" is a myth. Children with an overdeveloped amygdala who live in "survival mode" can develop an upstairs brain and learn to regulate emotion, think logically, and learn. People are not stuck—they just have to get the neurons in their brain to fire together and build connections, which is done through experiences.[106]

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[105] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child*, 7.

[106] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child*, 7.

Experience rewires the brain. Play is one of the best experiences for people, because through play the brain replaces bad experiences with new ones.[107] For children with an overdeveloped amygdala from overexposure to trauma, play can create brain health and vertical integration between the upstairs and downstairs brain. Ten minutes of one-on-one connection through playtime with an adult, where the child leads and the adult does not teach, question, or instruct, changes the brain so that the amygdala does not remain overdeveloped.[108] Foster parents, adoptive parents, and social workers are trained on how to play so that their children can have new experiences that build healthy connections and create healthy brain balance.

Karyn B. Purvis devoted her life as an advocate for children's health through the study of neurochemistry and child behaviors. She was one of the founders of the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University and co-created Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI).[109] TBRI is a method used to help children with an overdeveloped amygdala caused by trauma and toxic stress disarm fear and form healthy attachment through the principles of connecting, empowering, and correcting infused with the concept of play.[110] Sheri Parris and Christian Hernandez, who work with the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, write, "Play promotes development of a

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[107] Empower to Connect Conference, hosted by Pathway Family Services, Inc., First Baptist Church, Santa Maria, CA, April 26-27, 2019.

[108] Empower to Connect Conference, hosted by Pathway Family Services, Inc., First Baptist Church, Santa Maria, CA, April 26-27, 2019.

[109] "Dr. Karyn Purvis," Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, Texas Christian University, accessed October 26, 2020, https://child.tcu.edu/karyn/#sthash.MrrAwcx2.dpbs.

[110] Sheri Parris and Christian Hernandez, "The Benefits of Play," Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, Texas Christina University, accessed October 26, 2020, https://child.tcu.edu/play/#sthash.gHfeGxVU.tsEIAKL1.dpbs.

wide range of socio-emotional skills, such as self-regulation, listening, negotiating, independent thinking, taking other perspectives, persistence, and curiosity."[111] All of these skills are developed through play and are needed for healthy conflict resolution. If a person cannot listen, regulate emotion, negotiate, critically think, understand other people's perspectives, and be curious of new outcomes, conflict will never resolve but escalate, and possibly explode.

Dr. Jaak Pankseep, who was a professor at Washington State University, researched affective and social neurosciences through the study of animals. "The function of play is to build pro-social brains, social brains that know how to interact with others in positive ways."[112] Pankseep continues, "play behavior is remarkably similar across species."[113] If people want to handle conflict in ways that are constructive rather than deconstructive, it requires play. Play allows the brain to be pro-social, which allows the person to have positive interactions with others. It paves the way for constructive conflict resolution . People who do not have vertical integration in their brain, who have an overdeveloped amygdala, will not be able to handle conflict well. The high emotions and high stress of conflict can easily cause the amygdala to trigger and the brain loses all ability to regulate any emotion or thoughts, which will then only allow them to fight, run away, or freeze up and be unable to make any decisions. Play must be an essential practice of the congregation to help prepare churches for healthy conflict.

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[111] Parris and Hernandez, "The Benefits of Play."

[112] Jon Hamilton, "Scientists Say Child's Play Helps Build a Better Brain," NPR, August, 6, 2014, https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2014/08/06/336361277/scientists-say-childs-play-helps-build-a-better-brain.

[113] Hamilton, "Scientists Say Child's Play Helps Build a Better Brain."

Play not only helps people prepare for conflict, but it can help people heal from conflict. Karyn Purvis says, "Play is absolutely fundamental to the healing and the connections that your child will make in your family."[114] It is through play that the chemistry of fear in the brain is extinguished and the chemistry of healing is developed.[115] Play creates the correct brain chemistry for healing to take root within people. Go on a walk, share a meal, pull out the card games, or paint together. After conflict, care is done through play.

All Work and No Play

American culture is work-oriented.[116] Hard work is associated with success, pride, excellence, and achievement. It is believed that work should be the number one priority, whereas play is to be secondary, and too often play is seen as inappropriate and frivolous.[117] This has spilled over into our theology and church practice, as many churches believe that God is pleased by how hard His people work.[118] American churches have lost what is means to play in their spiritual lives, even though play is a biblical and ancient tradition.[119] The body of Christ needs to rediscover what it means to play.

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[114] "Give Your Child Playfulness," Empowered to Connect, YouTube Video, 2:12, August 15, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OzJBi_xLKc.

[115] Empowered to Connect, "Give Your Child Playfulness."

[116] Leonard Sweet, *The Well-Played Life* (Bonita Springs, FL: Tyndale Momentum, 2014), 3.

[117] Brian Edgar, *The God Who Plays* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 2, Ebook Central.

[118] Sweet, *The Well-Played Life,* 3.

[119] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 2.

Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher, believed that humans are God's playthings. He writes, "..man is contrived, as we said above, to be a plaything of God, and the best part of him is really just that; and thus I say that every man and woman ought to pass through life in accordance with this character, playing at the noblest of pastimes, being otherwise minded than they now are."[120] Plato makes the point that one of the best parts of being human is the honor of playing with God, yet so many are caught in the seriousness of humanity. It is important to make this distinction: God does not play us, but we play with God and God plays with us.[121] God plays, so if the church is to reflect the character of God, it must be a congregation of people who play.

The prophet Zechariah was sent by the Lord to speak to the Israelites that had returned home to Jerusalem after being in Babylonian exile. In chapter 8, Zechariah addresses God's intent to bless the future of Zion.[122] He assures them of God's promise toward them. In Zechariah 8:3-5, the Lord says to the Israelites,

> I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain…. Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.

George Klien, a Senior Professor of Old Testament at Southwestern Baptist Seminary and a scholar in the book of Zechariah, comments on these verses, "Children … represent the future for any society. Further, the themes of play and rest stand in sharp contrast to

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[120] "Plat. Laws 7.803," Plato Laws, Perseus Digital Library, accessed October 26, 2020, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0166%3Abook%3D7%3Apage%3D803#note1.

[121] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 8.

[122] George Klein, *The New American Commentary: Zechariah*, volume 21B (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 68e, ProQuest Ebook Central.

the endless labor necessary to rebuild the land. Zechariah promised that Jerusalem will see her children play again, and Zion will hear the laughter of her children one more."[123] Jerusalem experienced years of exile and labor because they turned their backs on God, but now the people can play. When God dwells with creation, play happens! God's presence ushers in play, laughter, and joy. Jesus says to the disciples in Matthew 13:3, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." If the presence of God causes children to dance in the street, and Jesus taught that adults must become like children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, then all people, no matter their age, are to play: to play with God and play with others. The body of Christ is to be a people of play in a culture that demands work. What sets the Church apart from the world is the ability for holy play.

The loss of play in our churches has had many consequences, one being that worship services have become boring. Blog after blog addresses the issue of people being bored in church. On Reddit, u/*HessianMedic* asks, "I find church boring and repetitive. Is this a bad thing?"[124] In the post, they say, "I always keep checking my watch wondering when we can leave. I don't know what's so attractive about always being there for over an hour and a half." This post received a variety of responses. Reddit user *vanetti* writes, "I personally have found myself bored to tears at some services and riveted in others." *Kvrdave* responds, "For a lot of people it's true. I don't necessarily think it's bad, but it one of the reasons I don't attend anymore." *WiseChoices* comments, "I agree. Sitting in

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[123] Klein, *The New American Commentary: Zechariah*, 68k.

[124] HessianMedic, "I Find Church Boring and Repetitive. Is this a Bad Thing?" Reddit, April 1, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/Christianity/comments/88sxdk/i_find_church_boring_and_repetitive_is_this_a_bad/.

rows, facing the front and going thru the same thing over and over again is mind numbing. I like it when Holy Spirit gets to call the plays. That is so fun! God isn't boring. He gets things done."[125]

Churches that do not play together, even in worship, will be boring and ultimately cause people to find play in other churches or elsewhere. Playless churches will struggle with dullness, suffer from burnout, depression,[126] and anxiety, will fight against change,[127] and will not be creative, joyful, innovative, or relational.[128]

The result of a playless church is seriousness, and the church struggles with the sin of seriousness.[129] On March 18, 2018, Pepperdine University in Malibu hosted the Christian folk rock band from Ireland called Rend Collective. They were traveling with their Good News Tour. In the middle of the concert, every member of the band put on panda heads and celebrated on stage. There was no theological reason for the panda heads, except for play, laughter, and joy. In the concert they explained, "Seriousness is not a fruit of the Spirit, but joy is."[130] Congregations need to recognize the sin of seriousness, explore play, and find the joy of the Spirit.

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[125] HessianMedic, "I Find Church Boring and Repetitive. Is this a Bad Thing?"

[126] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 8.

[127] Courtney Ellis, "Churches that Play Together Stay Together," Christianity Today, March 14, 2019, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/march-web-only/churches-that-play-together-stay-together.html.

[128] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 8.

[129] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 10.

[130] Rend Collective, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA, March 18, 2018.

Play plays an integral part in relationships[131]—relationship with God and with others. If congregations want close and intimate relationships, they will need to play together. Without play, church life will become moralistic and be an obligation.[132] Courtney Ellis wrote an article called "Churches That Play Together Stay Together." In the article she spoke with several pastors about how adding play to their congregational life has affected the church. Katie Nix from Moberly, Missouri, said,

> Our congregation is experiencing some growing edges as younger families begin to assume leadership roles. Usually the generations become divided between gatekeepers and new people, but kickball helped to break down some of the walls of fear and create relationships. I believe we avoided several potential turf wars because the two groups experienced an opportunity to play together.[133]

Antoine Lassiter pastored a church which consisted of a merger of a white congregation and a Black congregation. At first, the congregations would not intermix, and Lassiter realized that play would be the key to bringing these two congregations together as one. He said,

> For the first three months [after the churches merged] I was a politician. I had stopped having fun and the ministry became dark. It became stressful. Then I realized that it wasn't for me to make it work. It needed to be a Holy Spirit–led thing. We have a church full of young men who play basketball, so I started walking with them and having fun with them. And that's where I think the church turned.[134]

In both of these circumstances, which are normally high-conflict situations, play was used to defuse the problems. At the end of the article, Ellis concludes, "From softball leagues to book clubs, jazz ensembles to craft nights, churches that play together seem to

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[131] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 8.

[132] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 8.

[133] Ellis, "Churches that Play Together Stay Together."

[134] Ellis, "Churches that Play Together Stay Together."

stay together and grow together, too, adapting more easily to upheaval and building up the camaraderie, compassion, and collective resilience that are essential to a robust church body."[135] Play helps build connections, relationships, commitment to others, and adaptability that results in unity and peace in the body of Christ.

Play, such as team activities like kickball, reading clubs, and game nights, increases the quality of life and improves psychological help, but there is also spiritual play.[136] Playing and having fun with God nurtures spiritual growth.[137] Playing with God is discipleship.[138] Leonard Sweet, in his book *The Well-Played Life,* writes, "Living a 'well-played' life means experiencing the fullness of joy that comes from being in deep with the divine, cleaving close to the covenant, living in sync with the Spirit, and yoked to Christ to the point of surrendered trust in God's providences and promises."[139] The more Christlike and surrendered the church becomes, the more the church will desire constructive conflict resolution, because disciples of Jesus will want the journey through conflict to resemble Jesus and nothing else.

Play can help prepare people for conflict, it can help people heal after conflict, and it draws the Church closer to God. God has never been boring, and neither should the church. It is time for the church to become childlike and discover what it means to play together and play with God. The church needs more play, laughter, and joy.

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[135] Ellis, "Churches that Play Together Stay Together."

[136] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 8.

[137] Edgar, *The God Who Plays,* 8.

[138] Sweet, *The Well-Played Life,* 18.

[139] Sweet, *The Well-Played Life,* 20.

The Time Is Now

If a congregation is stuck in consumeristic worship and does not eat or play together, then the time is now for that to change. Remove the "me" from corporate worship and make it "us." Create a time and space for connection to be made and relationships to be built. Play together and bring laughter and joy to church life. Prepare people for the conflict that will inevitably happen. This change does not have to happen in giant leaps. The steps can be simple and small. Add a Scripture to a Sunday worship service for the congregation to read aloud corporately, with an explanation as to why this is an important practice. Change the language around communion to center unity. Invite a couple of families to the park for a picnic to share a meal and then play together with a game of checkers or tag. Create a coffee bar with muffins in the foyer before church to encourage fellowship.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, conflict will happen, but how people respond to it is a choice. Little steps that encourage corporate worship, shared meals, and play with God and others can help people chose the right path in conflict resolution. The time is now to prepare people for successful conflict resolution instead of failure that leads to broken relationships, hurt feelings, and divisiveness in the body of Christ. Like the Boy Scouts of America, may the church be prepared!

CONCLUSION:

THE STORY OF CONFLICT

The Scriptures are filled with story after story of conflict. It is inescapable, but truly, the church should not want to escape it. Conflict reveals the character and integrity of the congregation and it has the potential to strengthen relationships, spiritual depth, and unity. Unfortunately, the story of conflict within congregations is often one filled with hurt, pain, and divisiveness.

An All-Too-Familiar Story of Conflict

A family has been a part of the congregation for three generations. The wife serves as the Outreach Director and has a strong conviction for world missions. She encourages the church to support global missions through overseas mission trips, teaching mission lessons to the children, and with giving through the denomination. In recent years, a family moved to town that actively supports homeless shelters in the community. Regularly, this family approaches the Outreach Director to get their local church to provide meals or make hygiene bags for the people who are in the shelter, but time and time again, the Outreach Director ignores the requests.

The family decides to approach the lead pastor, but he just informs the family that they need to be patient and he has confidence in the Outreach Director. Unhappy and hurt by their pastor's response, they speak with their small group about the situation. One person in the small group is on the Outreach Ministry Team and offers that this group could adopt the local shelters and serve there. They raise funds with friends and family on social media, collect coats at winter, and make a meal for the shelter once a month.

The Outreach Director becomes frustrated with this "rag-tag" team that, in her opinion, has gone rogue. Offerings for global missions is down and people in the church have started to notice the momentum and energy of the small group which serves the homeless shelter. Congregational members have questions about why the church is not more active in serving the homeless and how they could get involved. Out of frustration and jealousy, she decides that anyone who is in that small group or that serves at the shelters will no longer be on the Outreach Ministry Team and she has started to vent and complain to congregational members.

At the annual church meeting, the lead pastor has asked for every ministry leader to come forward and give a quick synopsis of their ministry. The Outreach Director has a slideshow of pictures from mission trips and explains how churches overseas have been blessed by the church's generous offerings, "even though it was not as high this year as it has been previous years." At the end of her presentation, someone stands up and demands that the local outreach opportunity be included in her ministry summary. At the end of this demand, a large group of people yells, "Amen!" The other half of the congregation hems and haws. The lead pastor, completely confused at the situation, says, "Yes, local missions is a priority!" The next day, the lead pastor comes into the office to find a resignation letter on his desk. The Outreach Director has resigned and her family will find another church to attend, as will several other families in the church.

This is a story of conflict with which all too many churches are familiar. The conflict turned the church toward an "us-versus-them" mentality, leaders ignored the issues, emotions and hurt escalated, and divisions were created. This led to the unity of the congregation breaking down.

This paper has been written to help equip pastors and leaders keep the unity of their church even through conflict. In order to accomplish unity in the church, pastors must re-sign conflict and tell a new story where conflict is an opportunity to build and grow relationships, to create and imagine new possibilities, and to celebrate diversity and unity within the church. The second chapter of this paper looked at how religious leaders teach and equip churches for conflict. Chapter three reviewed workplace conflict to gain insight on methods for healthy conflict resolution for task conflict. The next chapter considered marriage experts and their research on relational conflict and how that applies to conflict within congregations. Chapter five examined the life, ministry, and relationships of Jesus Christ and how he managed conflict he encountered. It also explored the writings of Paul, where he taught the church conflict resolution for unity. The sixth chapter reviewed the church's response to conflict through constructive measures to build relationships within the church through corporate worship, fellowship around the table, and play.

Major Applications for Congregational Conflict

Churches can change the story of conflict. This can happen through training leadership in conflict resolution and teaching the following aspects of conflict resolution. First, not all conflict needs to be addressed immediately. Rather, pastors and leaders can do their due diligence to prepare for conversations regarding conflict. They can pray for wisdom and guidance, evaluate their own emotions, gather information, look at goals and outcomes, and plan the conversation. When Jesus encountered conflict, he considered who was involved and their agendas and intentions before he responded. He took his time to thoughtfully respond. People make careless mistakes when in a rush, and conflict does

not always need to be resolved in the moment. It can be a powerful moment for a pastor to say, "Let's meet in two days so that we can both pray about this and I can be prepared to listen and understand you." Preparation is not avoidance, but a tool for constructive conflict resolution.

The mission, vision, values, and goals of the congregation are important. When everyone understands these, they are able to look at the conflict and determine what outcomes align with the DNA of their church. When leaders know they are about to have a meeting which has the potential for conflict, they could read aloud the mission, vision, values, and goals of the church as a way to frame the conversation. This allows for everyone to work toward the same goals and uphold the identity of their congregation.

Another important reminder for pastors and leaders in conflict is that everyone in the room is a child of God. In conflict, it can be easy for people to villainize the person they are in conflict with or to see them as enemies or opponents. Conflict also exists between people of different levels of power or leadership with the church. If everyone is reminded that they are children of God, it helps to equalize the power, reminds them that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity, and helps erase any sense of superiority.

When pastors and leaders work to resolve conflicts, they need to remember that the object of the conflict is not the main issue. The relationship of the people involved needs to be a top priority. Conflict becomes deconstructive to the church when it harms relationships. Constructive conflict resolution honors, nourishes, and grows relationships. To do this will require empathy, grace, truth, active listening, and understanding. Pastor and leaders need to do everything within their power and capabilities to preserve the

relationships throughout the conflict process. Often emotion and tension escalate in conflict, which can quickly lead to deconstructive conflict management. When escalation happens, a break is necessary to prioritize the relationship and not the outcome. If everyone pauses to breathe, think, take a walk, pray, or get a snack, when they come back, a constructive atmosphere can exist where conflict can be resolved and relationships preserved.

Jesus' life and ministry were about forgiveness. He created a forgiveness culture with his disciples that permeated his relationships. Forgiveness was given immediately and always. Churches need to have a forgiveness culture to constructively resolve conflict and deal with perpetual conflict. This can be achieved when pastors preach forgiveness regularly, write and use liturgy that promotes confession and forgiveness, sing songs and recite prayers of forgiveness, and model it. Without forgiveness, conflict will not resolve and bitterness will make itself at home in the heart of the church. Although people constantly tried to shame Jesus, his disciple betrayed him, another disciple denied him, and his people killed him, he never let bitterness overcome him, but offered forgiveness over and over.

Jesus embodied truthfulness, gentleness, and merciful justice. Constructive conflict does not mean that it is easy or that it will be painless. In fact, it can often hurt. Truth can be difficult to hear, but it is necessary. There is a difference between blunt and harsh truthfulness and truthfulness that is given with gentleness and merciful justice. Pastors and leaders of congregations must be courageous and speak the truth in the midst of conflict, but they also must be humble and open to hear others speak truth as well.

How truth is given often affects how it will be received. Harsh truth will be received harshly. Gentle truth will help people receive it gently.

Although conflict is a part of every aspect of people's lives, most people are ill-equipped to face it in healthy and constructive ways. Before people officially join the church or become regular attenders, it would be beneficial for there to be a training or conversation about how the church addresses conflict. This will help people know that when, not if, they encounter conflict, they are welcome to come to the church leaders to help them through it and not let it build into resentment or bitterness. It helps new people to the church understand the conflict is not something to be feared, but rather it normalizes it and provides them with knowledge on how to deal with it. Churches should also prioritize training for ministry leaders so that they become knowledgeable of different resolution strategies that can help resolve conflict with positive outcomes. In Paul's letters, he makes it clear that how churches resolve conflict represents Jesus Christ. A combination of training, workshops, coaching, and mentoring can prepare people for conflict resolution in a way that reflects the character and nature of Christ.

Congregations and leaders who are equipped on how to manage conflict constructively still must make the choice to do so. Churches that have strong bonds of relationship and community will help people to choose constructive conflict resolution. Connection and relationships are built through corporate worship, table fellowship, and play. In corporate worship, the focus moves away from "me" and to "us." It pushes against the consumerism that plagues American culture and fights for unity when churches sing, read Scripture, sit in silence, and take Eucharist together. At the table, identity and story are formed when people share food and conversation. Play defuses fear

and hurt and it also creates strong connections between people. Without play, churches default into seriousness and becoming boring, which leads to people with no desire to engage in relationship. Through play, table fellowship, and corporate worship, pastors and ministry leaders can prepare people for conflict that brings growth and celebrates unity within local church and changes the story of conflict.

Conflict Retold

Imagine how different the story of the conflict between global and local missions could have ended if constructive conflict resolution had happened. As the new family joined the church, they attended a Members Meeting that introduced the vision, mission, values, history, and theology of the local church. In this meeting, the pastor spoke for ten minutes about conflict. He acknowledged that it will happen and set up boundaries for how this community resolves it. The pastor prepared this family for the inevitable conflict they will face.

After this family has attended for a year, they would like their new church home to become more involved in local outreach at the homeless shelters. They have been upset that the Outreach Director has not done more locally and focuses only on global missions. From their membership meeting, they know that they need to speak with the pastor or the Outreach Director so their frustration does not turn into resentment or cause divisions within the church if they speak to their friends instead.

The Outreach Director accepts the request for a meeting with a family that would like to talk about their frustrations with the direction of outreach ministries. From the training she received at leadership meetings, she knows she cannot avoid the conversation, it would be better to discuss this over dinner, and she needs to come with

empathy, respect, and gentleness, and be able to actively listen. Days before she meets with them at her house for dinner, she talks with the lead pastor about holding her accountable for how she manages the conflict and prays daily for wisdom and healthy resolution.

At the start of the dinner, the Outreach Director goes over the vision and values of their local church and reminds everyone that they are all beloved children of God. Then she allows the family to share what is on their hearts and their frustrations. Through active listening, she discovers that when the wife was younger, she and her mother had to live in a homeless shelter for a couple of months. It was the worst time of her life and she promised herself that she would do everything within her power to help people in this situation when she was older. From there, the Outreach Director and the family collaborate on how their congregation could get involved locally. They come up with a plan for the church to ask for volunteers for the meals they serve at the shelter and advertise on the church's social media accounts for blanket and hygiene donations. At the end of dinner, the couple have also asked for information for the next overseas mission trip and has set up a time for their families to get together for a bowling night in a few weeks. Both leave their time together feeling heard, hopeful, and excited about the new friendships that are blossoming.

A Pastor's Story of Conflict

Church has always been a part of my story, but with that also came conflict. I remember a time when my mom was the Youth Director at the church and my dad was the Sunday School Superintendent. My mom came back from a youth meeting and I knew there was conflict but was unsure of exactly what happened. A week or so later, I

was teaching the Kindergarten Sunday School class when a woman, a member of the youth council, barged into my classroom and yelled at me for not being in the Youth Sunday School Class. She thought I needed to find my rightful place in the church in the youth department. I was eighteen years old and I remember sobbing in my pastor's office. Apparently, the conflict at the youth meeting was between my mom and this woman and she decided to take out her anger and frustration with my mom out on me.

As a teenager, I felt a call to ministry and was going to head to our denominational university to major in theology and ministry. The university offered incredible scholarships to ministry students, but I had to have a local minister's license to qualify for it. After my interview with the church board, the pastor pulled me aside and told me that if I attended any of my school dances, he would revoke my minister's license for he did not believe that a Christian could go to dances. I was the Student Government President in my high school and would have to plan several dances my senior year. The husband to the woman who had verbally lashed out at me had gone to the pastor to report my responsibilities at school. Due to conflict with no resolution and bitterness that had developed, a couple that previously mentored and discipled me started to work against me. It was months, maybe even years, before I received an apology for their behavior. Meanwhile, I was left heartbroken over the way the conflict played out in my life.

I tell this story from my youth because, even though I was left heartbroken over this conflict, it never kept me from church. For the past fourteen years, I have served as a pastor to several congregations and many different age groups. The hardest part of ministry is when I have had to apologize to people for the hurt caused by the church from mismanaged conflict. There have been people who have ignored their call to vocational

ministry, college students who have left the church, and families that have gone from church to church due to mismanaged conflict.

In college, I majored in theology and ministry and in my four years only one lecture addressed the topic of conflict. In Seminary, I had one practicum class where the professor helped us think through conflict with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. As I entered ministry, I felt completely unprepared for conflict within the church. Thankfully, I have had several pastors who have mentored me and taught me how to constructively navigate conflict, but I have also had pastors that completely ignored conflict because it made them uncomfortable. Unfortunately, I have many friends in the ministry who have not had good mentors or coaches for conflict resolution, and they move from one church to the next or become completely burned out.

I served at a church that was riddled with conflict. Most people just ignored it. There was a lot of bitterness and resentment in the hearts of leaders, pastors, and congregational members. There had been a split in the church about twenty years before I arrived, and they had not healed from it. There were times when the staff belittled each other, had back-room conversations about each other, and let bitterness fester. It often felt hopeless. As I started my research for my dissertation, I was asked what problem I would like to address within the church. Immediately conflict came to mind. Through this research, I have been filled with hope because the story of conflict does not have to end in heartbreak. It can result in heart renewal.

United Together

Every church experiences conflict. Church health is not determined by how much conflict they have. Since conflict is a result of relationship, churches that have strong

connections will experience more conflict, but will be able to constructively resolve those conflicts because of those bonds. Rather, the healthiness of a church is determined by how the church manages their conflict and if they preserve their unity.

The church, despite its diversity and differences, is called to be one. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:4-6, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." In all that the church does, it is to be done as one. Unity is how the church reflects God to the world. It is time for the people of God to stand side by side and put an end to destructive conflict cycles that prevent the church from being united.

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