

Dealing with Conflict in Congregations
Pacific School of Religion
Summer Session 2009
Course Syllabus

Goals of the course

This course has three congregational foci: (1) problem solving or making decisions about issues confronting a congregation, (2) dealing with difficult emotions in conflict, (3) identifying and changing conflict patterns in the organization. The course will focus on the role of the pastor: his/her conflict styles will be examined and training directed at developing her/his skill in analyzing and dealing with conflict.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this course the students will be able to:

1. Identify three dimensions of conflict: problem solving, emotional/faith dimensions, and the systemic dimensions.
2. Describe three to six specific strategies to deal with each of these dimensions in a conflict. In other words, the student will have ideas about what s/he might do to help an organization make decisions, reduce anxiety in the system, and help the organization recognize and change patterns of behavior that interfere with managing conflict well.
3. Identify his or her preferred conflict management style in different settings.
4. Assess what conflict styles might work best in a given situation.
5. Assess the level of conflict in a congregational dispute.
6. Describe four to seven strategies to manage his or her own anxiety in conflict.

Class Structure

Students may enroll in the class for academic credit or for continuing education units (CEUs). All enrolled students will be asked to participate in lecture, discussion, and experience based learning exercises. Short (no more than twenty-five pages) reading assignments will be made for all students to prepare for every class session, including the first session. Note: all students should come to class on the first day having filled out the inventory: *Discover Your Conflict Management Style*. This inventory is available from the GTU textbook department or it can be ordered for delivery by mail from the Alban Institute: <http://alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=578>. It will also be necessary for students to have access to Lott, *Conflict Management in Congregations*. This book can be purchased at the GTU textbook department or from the Alban Institute, <http://alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=528>. Other reading material for each class will be provided as handouts to the students.

Those taking the course for academic credit will be asked to read two other books on conflict and write a ten to fifteen page paper which will be due one week after class is over. In order to receive academic credit or CEUs the student must attend all class sessions.

Class Schedule

Monday

Reading assignment: students will have purchased and filled out the inventory *Discover Your Conflict Management Style*.

- 8:30 A.M. Get acquainted and review of class goals and schedule
- 9:30 Lecture: introduction to conflict in voluntary organizations: decision making, faith and emotional dimensions, and systemic dimensions
- 10:30 Lecture: *Discover Your Conflict Management Style*,
- 11:15 Students will review their conflict management styles with others in the class
- 12:30 P.M. Close

Tuesday

Reading assignment: “The Basics of Conflict Management” in Lott, *Conflict Management in Congregations*

- 8:30 A.M. Opening meditation
- 8:45 Small groups analyze conflict situations and recommend strategies for coping with the situation
- 10:30 Lecture: formal decision making strategies in conflicted congregations: finding interests, options for mutual gain, voting (congregational meetings)
- 12:30 P.M. Close

Wednesday

Reading assignment: “Go to the Balcony” from Ury: *Getting Past No*

- 8:30 A.M. Opening meditation
- 8:45 Role Play: finding interests
- 11:00 Lecture: Levels of conflict
- 12:30 P.M. Close

Thursday

Reading assignment: “Passion’s Slaves” from Goleman: *Emotional Intelligence*

- 8:30 A.M. Opening meditation
- 8:45 Lecture: Faith, hope and conflict
- 10:00 Personal reflection and sharing: managing anxiety
- 11:30 Lecture: Leadership in conflict
- 12:30 P.M. Close

Friday

Reading assignment: Arcadia case study

8:30 A.M. Opening meditation
8:45 Lecture: systems as interlocking contracts
11:00 Case study
12:30 P.M. Close

Recommended Reading

Some of the following books may be helpful to students writing papers in this course.

Brubaker, David. *Peril and Promise*. The Alban Institute, 2009

Friedman, Edwin. *Generation to Generation, Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. Guilford Press, 1985.

Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam Books, 1995.

Kerr, Michael E. and Bowen, Murray. *Family Evaluation: The Role of the Family as an Emotional Unit that Governs Individual Behavior and Development*. WW Norton, 1988.

Leas, Speed. *Discover Your Conflict Management Style*. The Alban Institute, 1997.

Leas, Speed. *Moving Your Church Through Conflict*. The Alban Institute, 1985. This book is available for download from <http://alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=3544>

Lott, David, *Harvesting the Learning: Conflict Management in Congregations*. The Alban Institute 2001.

Hopkins, Nancy Myer and Laaser, Mark. *Restoring the Soul of a Church, Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct*. The Alban Institute, 1995.

Hocker, Joyce and Wilmont, William. *Interpersonal Conflict*. 7th edition. McGraw-Hill, 2005.

Mayer, Bernard, *Staying with Conflict: A Strategic Approach to Ongoing Disputes*, Jossey Bass, 2009

Rendle, Gilbert. *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations*. The Alban Institute 1999.

Scarf, Maggie. *Intimate Partners: Patterns in Love and Marriage*. Random House, 1987.

Steinke, Peter L. *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*. The Alban Institute, 2006.

Stone, Douglas and Patton, Bruce and Heen, Sheila. *Difficult Conversations*. Viking Penguin Putnam Inc. 1999.

White, William L. *The Incestuous Workplace*, Hazeldon 1997.

Papers

Participants wishing academic credit will write one 10–15 page paper.

The paper may be on either of the following two topics:

Write a thoughtful reflection on your conflict management style in a public situation or situations. (By public is meant in any non-family or non-intimate partnership situation). The student should identify an environment in which s/he has had significant conflict. One case situation or incident should be identified. The student will describe the strategies s/he used in that particular conflict situation, indicate the degree

the strategies s/he used were useful or not useful in helping him/her achieve his/her ends, those which were useful or not useful in helping him/her maintain relationship with the other, and those which were useful or not useful helping the other achieve his/her ends in the situation. In addition to reflecting on personal strategies for dealing with the outward dimensions of the conflict, the student should describe in this paper those internal factors in his/her life which trigger or foster anxiety and those strategies which help him/her manage that anxiety. This paper should demonstrate that the student has read the assigned material related to managing the personal dimensions of conflict and relate that material to his/her personal situation.

Or the student may write a paper on a conflict in a local church or synagogue. The student is to describe the elements of the conflict which have to do with the problems to solve, those elements which have to do with persons and the personal dimensions of conflict, and those elements which have to do with the systemic dimensions of the conflict. After describing these three dimensions of the conflict, the student is to develop a strategy for dealing with conflict from the perspective of a pastor or that of a consultant—the student must be clear which perspective s/he will use.

Paper Format

All papers must be typed. They may be submitted on paper or in electronic format. Papers submitted in electronic format must be in one of the following formats: HTML, PDF, Rich Text Format, Word or WordPerfect. They may be submitted to Mr. Leas at *P.O. Box 2250, Boulder Creek, CA 95006. Phone. (831) 338-1024, Fax: (831) 338-1025. E-mail: speedleas@att.net.*