



CBF Peer Learning Groups

Responding to congregational conflict

The question isn't whether or not a congregation will experience conflict, but how its leaders and members will deal with conflict when it arises. Leaders must understand their conflict management styles and healthy congregational processes to utilize conflict constructively.

Statistics from a 2005-2006 study of reformed and evangelical pastors indicated that:

- 80% of churches recently experienced conflict
- 70% of pastors regularly consider leaving the ministry
- 63% had been fired at least twice
- 78% had been forced to resign at least once

Conflict has potential for both destructive and constructive effects on organizations.

Destructive conflict

- Is emotion-centered
- Is person-centered
- Undermines teamwork
- Undermines the ability to make decisions
- Undermines commitment to decisions
- Seeks a win-lose solution

Constructive conflict

- Is issue- or problem-focused
- Does not confuse persons with positions
- Argues and disagrees without destroying the group's ability to work together
- Seeks to solve problems, not win arguments
- Seeks a win-win solution

Questions for discussion:

- What are some of the conflicts Jesus experienced in his ministry?
- What are some of the conflicts the early church dealt with?
- What wisdom can you take away from the handling of these conflicts in scripture?
- What are sources of conflict in your ministry setting?

- When have you seen conflict have destructive effects? Constructive effects? What prompted the differences?
- How might you:
 - Develop your own capacity to respond to conflict?
 - Embolden yourself to acknowledge and address conflict in helpful ways?
 - Learn to step back and analyze conflicts before acting?
 - Build trust with your congregation and leaders so that conflict can be more constructive?
 - Rely more fully on the promises of God?
- How can your PLG support you as you navigate a current conflict?