

Navigating Church Conflict

Equip Principle #1 – Understand, anticipate, and respond to the conditions that contribute to congregational conflict.

Equip Principle #2 – Practice the Core Disciplines of Soulful Engagement, Philippians 4:2-9

1. Obedience to the biblical standards of relational integrity, 4:2-3

Recommendation: Ken Sande, Relationship Wisdom, <https://rw360.org/biblical-peacemaking>

2. Balcony perspective based on God's redemptive presence, 4:4-5

Recommendation: Mark Sayers, *A Non-Anxious Presence: How a Changing World will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders*

Over every wilderness, chaotic environment, and gray zone, the Spirit hovers. The presence of God is always present, offering us the pattern of heaven. The plans, the heavenly blueprints that signal the renewal of any moment, and the reordering of the most chaotic environments. Every moment, every action, every thought, every problem contains the renewal potential of remaking that moment according to the pattern of heaven. This is hope.

You are not created to remain paralyzed in anxiety. You were not created to offer an anxious crowd quick-fix solutions and a panacea for their lostness. You were not patterned after heaven to retreat into a comfort zone. You were made in the image of God to bring chaos into order, as you act as a channel of God's will on earth. The Spirit manifests the pattern of heaven in the world, and we mediate that pattern as God's workers in creation.

The kingdom breaking out is when the heavenly pattern is initiated on earth. That is where you are called to be, at the point where heaven kisses the earth. At that intersection, the ways of the kingdom are revealed. We access a different power source to lead from. (Sayers, 164-166)

3. Non-anxious presence through prayerful reflection, 4:6-7

Recommendations:

- Table: Pete Steinke's comparison of self-differentiated and undifferentiated leadership
- Classic (has not been improved upon): Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*
- Recent: Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs*. See also, <https://www.stevecusswords.com/>

4. Staying connected through principled relationships, 4:8

Equip Principle #3 – Seek help and resources on the specific challenges in your leadership and church setting

Understand and adapt your conflict style to the situation

- DISC Personality Assessment, <https://lifeandleadership.com/disc-personality-test/>
- Ron Kraybill, Style Matters Inventory, <https://www.riverhousepress.com/>

Difficult conversations

- Cloud and Townsend, *How to Have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding*
- Arbinger Institute, *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*, also *Leadership and Self-Deception*
- Any of the special series such as the Harvard Negotiation Clinic's *Difficult Conversations*, Susan Scott's *Fierce Conversations*, and the Crucial Learning Group's *Crucial Conversations*
- See on LifeandLeadership.com: <https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-criticism-difficult-people-conversations/#difficultconversations>

LifeandLeadership.com resources for special challenges in church conflict

- Understanding Church Conflict, <https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-conflict-education>
- Conflict Resolution and Management, <https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-strategies-for-managing-and-resolving>
- Communication, Healthy Behaviors, and Forgiveness, <https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-communication-healthy-behavior-forgiveness>
- Communication Competence, Leaders, <https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/leadership-development#leaderdevcommunication>
- Congregational Trauma, Minister Misconduct, <https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-congregational-trauma-minister-misconduct>
- Criticism, Difficult People, Difficult Conversations, <https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-criticism-difficult-people-conversations>
- Leadership, Preaching, and Worship During Conflict, <https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-leadership-preaching-worship-in-conflict>

Note: A pdf copy of this presentation may be found at [LifeandLeadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-introduction/](https://lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/church-conflict-introduction/)

Congregational Major Occurrences and Chronic Conditions that Contribute to Conflict

Major Occurrences

- Departure of long-time minister
- Mismanagement of financial resources
- Minister sexually acting out
- New building program
- Forced resignation of a staff member
- Steady loss in membership
- Downturn in financial contributions
- Important changes in the lives of leaders
- Intense staff conflict
- Catastrophe destroying physical facilities
- Informal, nagging complaints
- Sudden, violent death of children
- Economic depression in larger society
- Rift between congregation and judicatory
- Group of members leaving congregation

Chronic Conditions

- Decision making residing in hands of a few people
- Griping as a normative way of behavior
- Pastor dominating almost every aspect of congregational life
- Little accountability
- Perennial shortage of money
- Nothing really getting done
- A sense of boredom or depression
- Feeling of hopelessness
- Small group dominating
- Differences ignored, not discussed
- “Viruses” enabled (secrets, blame)
- Poor or inadequate facilities

Pete Steinke’s comparison of self-differentiated and undifferentiated leadership¹

Undifferentiated	Self-differentiated
1. Quickly offended, easily provoked, too sensitive, slow to recover,	1. Self-managing, shapes the environment, resourceful.
2. Reactive, instinctive, automatic.	2. Responsive, intentional, thoughtful
3. Underhanded, covert, flourishes in the dark.	3. Open, light-shedding, aware
4. Demanding, willful, stubborn, resistant (especially to reason and love), unbending	4. Resilient, has sense of proportion
5. Think in black/white or yes/no, intolerant of ambiguity, seek final solution, want all or nothing.	5. Have breadth of understanding, allow time for things to process
6. Blame, criticize, displace, fault-finding, have poor discrimination	6. Take responsibility for self, learn when challenged, define self from within self
7. Uptight, serious, defensive	7. Relaxed, at ease, sensible
8. Competitive, either with or against, see life as a contest, contemptuous	8. Take turns, collaborate, stay in touch even when tension grows
9. Vague, non-specific, cloaked	9. Clear, objective, purposeful
10. Create too much or too little space and one-sided solutions	10. Create space, options, and common goals

¹ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, pp. 11, 91-92.