

North Carolina Synod Conflict Management

Conflict happens. When two or more are gathered we know Christ is there. We are also aware that relationships are sometime difficult. Conflict often occurs in our congregations at times of pastoral or staff transitions, with misunderstood expectations of clergy or congregational leaders, and tied to the congregation's painful past - losses or previous conflict. Conflicts can be scary when they threaten to divide our community connections and relationships with one another, and we often seek help to resolve these issues. The synod office is here to walk with you.

Here are several things we want you to know:

- Generally, if a report of conflict is from someone other than the congregation council president or a rostered minister, we will suggest that the issue needs to be first addressed to the rostered minister there and/or the council president.
- If a complaint is anonymous, we may worry about it but we cannot act on it.
- The Bishop and the Assistants to the Bishop share the conflict work through the synod.
 - Pastor Sara Ilderton & Bishop Smith will handle sexual misconducts.
 - Michael DeNise & Bishop Smith will attend to financial malfeasance matters.
 - Pastor Phil Tonnesen will be main contact in eastern NC
 - Pastor Sara Ilderton will be main contact in central NC
 - Deacon Tammy Jones West will be main contact in western NC
 - The Bishop will be aware of and, on a case-by-case basis, involved in all areas.
- The bishop or assistants will come visit with council at the invitation of the council or the rostered leader. The bishop or assistants will not make a visit without a formal invitation.
- We will not visit with a congregation council in a secret meeting. The rostered minister and council president will need to be informed that the synod staff's intervention has been requested.
- If the conflict requires more on-going attention and deep congregational work, we will refer you to a trusted resource such as the Center for Congregational Health or Healthy Congregation Facilitators.
- The synod has no jurisdiction in regards to non-rostered employees. These matters should be referred to your personnel committee or council.

Conflict is not always a bad thing. Conflict can be the impetus for positive change allowing the congregation to follow the call of the spirit into a new season of mission for the sake of the gospel.

Understanding Conflict

- *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, John Paul Lederach, Good Books, 1969.
Lederach is the architect of the "Conflict Transformation" movement which has helped bring healing in intractable international conflicts, as well as providing a framework for understanding conflict as more than something needing "mediation" or "resolution" but instead as an opportunity for learning.
- *Promise and Peril: Understanding and Managing Change and Conflict in Congregations*, David Brubaker, Alban Institute, 2009.

Understanding Systems and Leadership in the Midst of Conflict

- *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, Edwin Friedman, Seabury Books, 2007.
The posthumously published lectures of the preeminent theorist of systems in congregations, this book offers great perspective on taking a larger systemic view of what leaders need to know in times of change.
- *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Gil Rendle, Alban Institute, 1997.
Gil Rendle provides wisdom and perspective for leaders to understand the cycles of change and how to navigate in the midst of conflict.
- *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, Peter Steinke, Alban Institute, 2006.
Peter Steinke is a leading congregational consultant who helps congregations understand the systemic roots of the conflicts they experience.
- *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*; Ron Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, Marty Linski; Harvard Business School Press, 2009.
Understanding leadership as something which requires learning, adaptation and perspective, this book provides strategies for navigating complex situations and problems.

Tools and Strategies

- *Polarity Management*, Barry Johnson, HRD Press, 1996.
A tool for understanding the ways in which we can navigate between seemingly intractable polar positions.
- *The Power of a Positive No*, William Ury, Bantam, 2007.
Co-author of *Getting to Yes*, in this newer book Ury outlines ways in which we can say "no" in a positive way which leads everyone to a deeper understanding of purpose and value.
- *The Little Book of Circle Processes*, Kay Pranis, Good Books, 1969.
An excellent, brief outline of how to conduct listening circle open processes in which all perspectives can be effectively heard.
- *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, Mark Lau Branson, Alban Institute, 2004.
Branson utilizes the methods of appreciative inquiry in moving a congregation toward a vision of the future, rather than getting stuck in the past.