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## Leading Through Conflict

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## PETR ČINČALA

# LEADING THROUGH CONFLICT

Pastor Fred was in charge of small groups in his church. As one small group prepared to multiply, one young man was furious at the thought of the group “breaking up” and was extremely vocal in expressing his feelings. He even announced that if the group multiplied, he would leave the church completely. Pastor Fred spent countless hours talking to him on the phone to determine what was going on in his heart and attempt to figure out why he was so angry, all the while supporting the small group’s decision to multiply.

Pastor Jamie was in the process of kicking off a church plant. However, he made many assumptions about the energy and flexibility of his congregants, without taking the time to hear their views and needs. Finally, he decided to set up one-on-one meetings with the members to discuss the issues that had come up, as well as their needs and wants for the plant. He apologized for his actions and tried to explain his intentions. While some members refused to speak to him, others decided to work together with Pastor Jamie to move the church plant forward.

One Sabbath between Sabbath School and church, a deaconess cornered Pastor John as he was in his office doing last-minute sermon preparations. She was furious that someone had rearranged the platform for the service and had moved a flower arrangement that she had carefully assembled. Pastor John told her that the conversation would have to wait for another time, as he was preparing to preach. While this outraged her more, she had to accept that he had other obligations. When the two spoke about the platform and flower arrangement later, Pastor John discovered that the arrangement had been upset, which was the cause of the deaconess’s emotions.

Conflicts of many kinds can occur within the church: conflicts caused by individual behavior, theological conflict, staff conflicts around authority,

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respect, and responsibility, and conflicts triggered by change (Into Action, n.d.)—just to name a few! As Christian leaders, it can be challenging to navigate difficult situations and people, take into consideration many different views, and keep a heart full of Christ’s grace and mercy in the process.

In this issue of the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, we are going to examine different aspects of conflict in Christian leadership. We begin with a Biblical Reflection from Joy Jones-Carmack. Using insights from biblical cultural anthropology and sociology, this article discusses discipling and mentoring through an exegetical analysis of Exodus 18:13–23 and Judges 2:6–17. Although the importance of mentoring is often discussed in the leadership literature, research on discipleship in building and maintaining organizational culture is scarce. Failure to discuss the value of discipleship in organizational leadership primarily stems from discipleship being reserved for religious institutions and contexts. However, results of this exegetical analysis indicate that discipleship and mentorship have distinct implications, and discipleship may also hold value for secular organizational leadership.

In the Leadership Interview, Skip Bell, professor emeritus of Church Leadership for the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, opens up about his experiences in ministry—specifically those including conflict. By sharing stories his own experiences, Bell highlights the importance of mirroring Christ’s “constant kindness, constant gracefulness” in every situation.

The first Feature Article is brought to us by Steve Jeantet. Jeantet maintains that the stakeholder theory is useful in identifying individuals or groups that are invested in, benefit from, or are potentially harmed by an organization. This article identifies a weakness in the current literature. Unlike most for-profit organizations, where the various groups of stakeholders are relatively discrete, churches frequently have individuals who are meaningful stakeholders in several arenas simultaneously. The same person can be a program participant (customer), volunteer (unpaid employee), elder or deacon (board member), and donor (investor). This phenomenon is labeled “the multiple simultaneous stakeholder effect” herein, and proposed implications for pastors and opportunities for future research are discussed.

Our second Feature Article is written by Sam Chaise, who provides a new perspective on the concept of servant leadership. Servant leadership was originally proposed as an ethical way of leading and has become a near-synonym for Christian leadership. This is problematic, however, because cultures with differing power distance vary with regard

to their view of the ethical use of power in leadership. Further, most of the research and writing on servant leadership has been conducted in Western, professionalized cultures. It may be that the way servant leadership is currently being conceptualized is not applicable to all cultural settings, meaning that there are other “Christian” ways to lead.

In the Leadership Lived article, author Jack Ballard presents five roles common to team-building situations: mobilizer, theorist, evaluator, achiever, and motivator. These roles affirm the Apostle Paul’s analogy of the body under the leadership of Christ, who exemplified leadership as the embodiment of authority within servanthood. These dynamics affect all team efforts, from business and politics to church staffs and worship teams. By understanding these roles, one may recognize that leadership is not attributed to the most visible, defined, loudest, or “alpha” personality; rather, it is utilized based on need, skill, and role. Additionally, by understanding the concept of “co-leadership” as being shared among a team, members maximize talent and capability by balancing between authoritarianism and anarchy in the progress toward problem-solving and affirm both team ethos and individual contributions.

In this issue, we are proud to feature two Dialogue articles; we hope that these will provide food for thought and, ideally, conversation. The first of these articles is written by Gary Nelson. Nelson argues that God desires the church to be governed by multiple leaders under the authority of a single first chair leader (Rev. 2:1). U.S. African American churches follow this model by utilizing a plural-elder congregationalism system of governance; however, this can be, at best, daunting. At worst, it is an assignment fraught with angst, confusion, and manipulation that spawns disdain for church leadership. Principles of authority and submission, discernment, delegation, honor, and order are explored from the perspective of a second chair leader who has learned to thrive and survive in this crucible of leadership.

Our second Dialogue article is brought to us by Oluwaseun O. Afolabi and is entitled “Why Leadership Conflict Exists in the Church: The Structural Conflict Theory Perspective.” Leadership conflict is a main issue of the church. Many in leadership positions are ambitious, striving for positions of authority and power. However, authority and power have caused major issues due to the structural composition of the church, coupled with the aspirations and desires of the adherents to be continually relevant. These subjective reasons wreck the principles upon which the church is established. Though scholars have propounded

several theories on leadership and conflict, structural conflict theory explains the continuous presence of church leadership conflict.

Whether you are currently experiencing a season of conflict or not, we hope and pray that this issue of *JACL* will offer practical, helpful information and suggestions for navigating the inevitable conflicts that are a part of leadership.

## Resources

Into Action. (n.d.). *Which conflict do you have? New clergy's stories from the field.* <http://into-action.net>