

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary

Fall Semester 2008

PM 605
Church Conflict
(1-2 units)
Monday, Oct. 6th – Friday, Oct. 10th
6:00-9:00 PM

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Office Hours: 9-5 M-F

I. Course Description:

This course offers an examination of the causes, arenas, and dynamics of conflict in churches. The Christian leader's ability to respond appropriately and redemptively to conflict is given careful consideration. This course is steeped in a biblical theology of shalom that is unfolded through a gritty-yet-hopeful exploration of practical principles for addressing conflicted situations with pastoral integrity and discernment.

II. Required Texts:

For All Students:

- Halverstadt, Hugh F. *Managing Church Conflict*. Westminster John Knox, 1991.
- Leas, Speed B. *Discover Your Conflict Management Style*. Alban Institute, 1998.
- Poirier, Alfred. *The Peacemaking Pastor*. Baker, 2006.
- Steinke, Peter L. *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Time*. Alban Institute, 2006.

Additional Reading for 2 Credit Students:

- Boers, Arthur P. *Never Call Them Jerks*. Alban Institute, 1999.

[With the permission of the instructor, alternative texts can be selected by students who have read the Boers text in another class.]

- Cloud, Henry & Townsend, John. *How to Have That Difficult Conversation*. Zondervan, 2005.

III. Course Objectives:

At the conclusion of this class, the student should achieve an appropriate foundation for maturing competency in the following areas:

- Reflecting on Biblical resources related to the purposes of God's reign in relation to conflict.
- Developing an ability to analyze and assess conflict and to identify what intervention may be appropriate.
- Reflecting on the type of leadership needed in times of conflict.
- Discovering ways that conflict can offer opportunities for growth.
- Considering ways to nurture a culture of creative engagement with conflict.
- Learning ways of building consensus and working with resistance in groups.
- Cultivating and awareness of one's own tendencies in reacting to conflict.
- Fostering an ability to manage one's own responses to conflict appropriately.
- Developing greater awareness about one's communication style and its impact on others.
- Enhancing one's skills for communicating effectively in times of conflict.

IV. Course Schedule:

Session:	Daily Topic(s):	Coming to Class Prepared:
Mon, Oct 6 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • What Causes Conflict? • Theological Foundations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Steinke, chapter 1; Halverstadt, chapter 2; Poirier, Chapters 1-5
Tues, Oct 7 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congregational Systems • Conflict Management Styles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Steinke, chapters 2-9; Read Leas and complete assessment
Wed, Oct 8 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for Managing Church Conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Halverstadt, Chapters 3-12
Thurs, Oct 9 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles and Practices for Pastoring Peace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Poirier, Chapters 6-12
Fri, Oct 10 th [Session ends at 8 PM]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality Disorders and Congregational Conflict • The Peacemaking Church • Concluding Considerations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Poirier, Chapter 13; Steinke, Postscript

Please Note: One additional three-hour class session will be scheduled for all students who are enrolled in this course for two semester hours of credit. This additional session will take place later in the semester. The date for this class session will be established prior to the conclusion of module week.]

V. Course Requirements:

Please Note: All written assignments are expected to conform to either MLA or Chicago format and style and must reflect a level of writing appropriate to master's-level work.

All students (those registered for both 1 semester hour and 2 semester hours) must complete the first two assignments. These assignments are due no later than Friday, November 7th at 5:00 PM. These assignments may either be submitted by email or delivered in-person to my office.

Conflict Analysis: The student must engage in an analysis of a real-world incident of congregational conflict. The conflict may either be current or something that has occurred in the past. Furthermore, it may be drawn from the student's own experience or from interviewing another party (or parties). The student should exercise care in respecting issues of confidentiality by using fictitious substitutes for all personal and institutional names that factor into the incident. Employing the resources introduced in this course, the student must analyze the causes of the conflict and the effectiveness of church leader's approach to dealing with it. The student must make recommendations rooted in the content of this class for how the conflict might be/have been handled more effectively. This paper must be 5 to 6 double-spaced pages in length.

Book Report: The student will complete a book report on one of the two following texts: 1) Halverstadt or 2) Poirier. This report is to be double-spaced and ***must*** be between 2 and 3 pages in length. In order for full credit to be granted, the following elements should be addressed in the text of the report:

1. Author, book title, publisher, city and year of publication.
2. Tell something about the author that may be helpful in understanding the content of the book.
3. Provide a short summary of the book's contents, with particular attention to the following elements:
 - a. A one-sentence explanation of the thesis of the book.
 - b. Brief paragraphs that summarize each major sections of the book and its role in developing and/or supporting the central thesis of the book.
4. Explain the relevance of the book's contribution to Christian leadership within contexts like the one in which you currently serve or envision serving.
5. Provide your response to the author's central thesis and its development in light of your own opinion and experience.

The following additional assignments must be completed by all students who are taking this course for 2 semester hours of credit. These two assignments are due no later than Friday, December 5th at 5:00 PM. They may either be submitted by email or delivered in-person to my office.

Additional Book Report: Following the criteria outlined above, write one additional book report on the text of your choice. The selected book must be approved by the course instructor.

AND EITHER:

Conflict Self-Assessment: Employing the results of the *Leas Conflict Management Style* inventory and insights drawn Cloud and Townsend, Steinke, and other sources used in this class, the student is to assess his/her personal effectiveness in responding to conflicted situations. The student should also provide suggestions regarding ways in which she/he might cultivate a growing capacity to respond to conflict redemptively and with integrity. This paper should be 5 to 6 pages in length.

OR:

Biblical Theology of Conflict Ministry: This assignment invites the student to engage in a sustained biblical investigation of the theme of conflict: Where does it come from? What does it mean to respond faithfully to conflict? The student should demonstrate clear engagement with scripture. This paper should be 5 to 6 pages in length.

VI. Grading:

[PLEASE NOTE: All Required activities must be completed. Student cannot pass the course until they are done.]

Late policy: All work is due at the time of class on date specified, unless otherwise arranged with the professor. In case of serious illness or emergency, please communicate with the professor ASAP. Grace is available.

MBBS academic policies (as well as other school policies) are described at <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies>. These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, accommodations for disability, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, grading templates, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to your professor or consult the Registrar.

Course evaluations are to be completed online and are due one week after the completion of the course. Official grades will not be posted until the student's evaluation of the course is completed.

VII. The Instructor's Commitment:

Having outlined the basic expectations to which you will be held accountable this semester, I also would like to identify the essential commitments that can be expected of me as your instructor. My commitment to you is that I will strive:

1. To model an attitude of openness and an earnestness toward the purposes of God's reign.
2. To honor your investment of time by being as prepared as I can be.
3. To assume primary responsibility for cultivating within the classroom an atmosphere of hospitality that will enable all participants to feel free and safe to engage openly in discussion and in discerning God's purposes.
4. To provide constructive and helpful feedback on all written assignments in a timely fashion.