

SHALOM!



The Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking and the First Responders Initiative, Part 1

Academy of Servant Leaders Track 1, Session 7

The Church of God in Michigan

Mark K. Richardson

September 6, 2025

HOPE IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT

Making Peace with Others
the Way
God Makes Peace with Us

Introducing the
Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking

Dr. Kenneth C. Newberger



OUTLINE



1. The Destructive Aspects of Church Conflict
 - A. Two Levels
 - B. The Scope of the Problem
2. The Pivotal Moment in the Unfolding of Conflict
3. The Absolute, Very Best, #1 Way to Resolve Conflict
4. From Theology to Reality, Part 2

Church Conflict: Destructive on Two Levels



(1)
It Causes
Individuals
to Suffer

One Pastor's Remarks

“The conflict was devastating because I was a relatively young pastor.

The conflict wounded me very deeply.”





“You know, it was like a death. I was dying. That’s one of the reasons I decided I had to leave. I felt like that they were killing me a piece at a time, and I couldn't understand why. People were making nasty phone calls and accusations.”



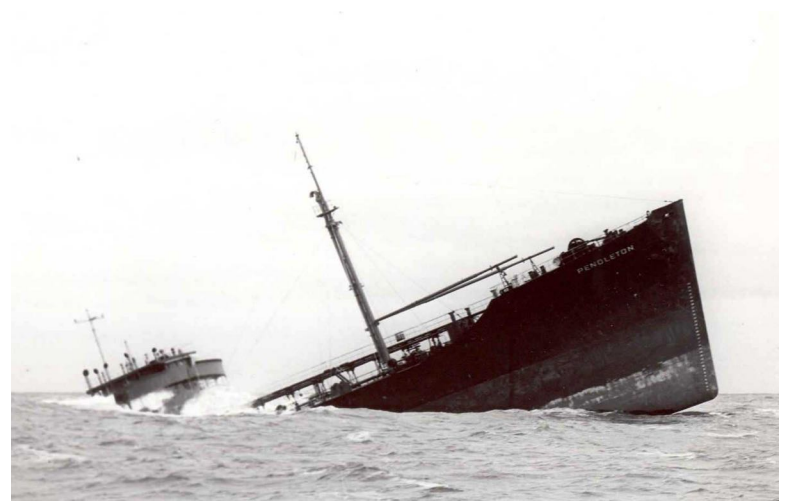
“I was like a ship tossed about on storm-driven seas without anchor, rudder, or sail.”



“I was just completely at the will of the elements. That’s the picture. That’s exactly how I felt. And I felt like, not only was I being tossed about...”



“...but I had a few holes in me because I hit the reefs. There was water pouring in.”



“I felt like I was going down. I was manning the pumps, and it wasn't good enough. It was excruciating. I felt, ‘I can't live like this anymore.’ The conflict day-to-day was too great.”



**Hundreds of pastors are leaving
the ministry every month**

**This man left pastoral ministry and hasn't returned.
This is not an isolated case.**



But it is not Just Pastors Who are Being Burned



Millions of People Have Stopped
Going to Church Because of

PAIN

Barna Himself

has been “chewed up”

3 different times at 3 different congregations.



“It can be a shattering reality when your ‘church home’ becomes a place of rejection and suffering while you are doing your best to be part of the spiritual family.”

Church Conflict: Destructive on Two Levels



(2)
It Causes
Damage on
a Corporate
Level

By Way of Illustration . . .



California Condors are North America's largest birds. They have a wingspan of over nine feet.

In 1982, the only California Condor egg that specialists could confirm had been laid that season, received a lot of attention.

At the time, there were less than 25 of these birds in the wild.



As characteristic of the species, the birds positioned their nest near the edge of a steep cliff.



This particular couple began squabbling as to which would sit on the egg.



When the male sat on the egg, the female would come and jab him in the face to push him away. When the female sat on the egg, the male would do the same.



At one juncture, the two left the nest to take their fight into the air. The birds became so absorbed in intimidating and attacking the other . . .



**neither
tended
to
the
egg.**



**This struggle for dominance lasted for hours
and had an unhappy ending!**



In the midst of their fighting, the birds knocked their egg down the cliff. It shattered on the rocks below.



From over a half a mile away, condor specialists helplessly watched as the condors destroyed the very thing they were fighting over.

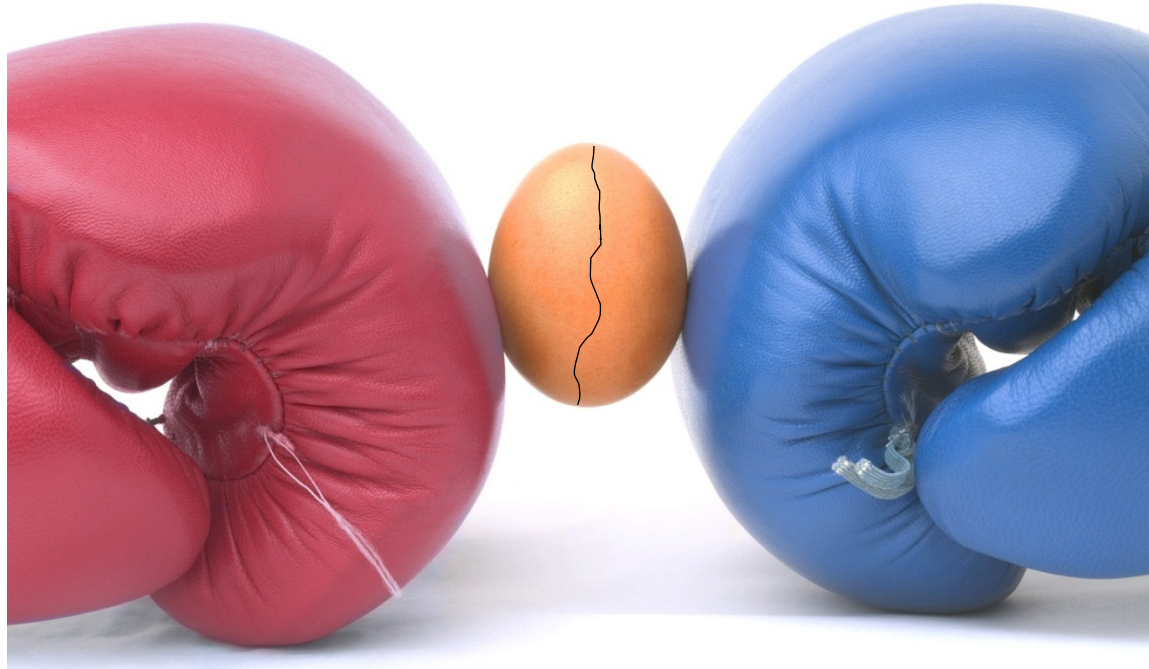
Lesson

When We Think About Church Conflict



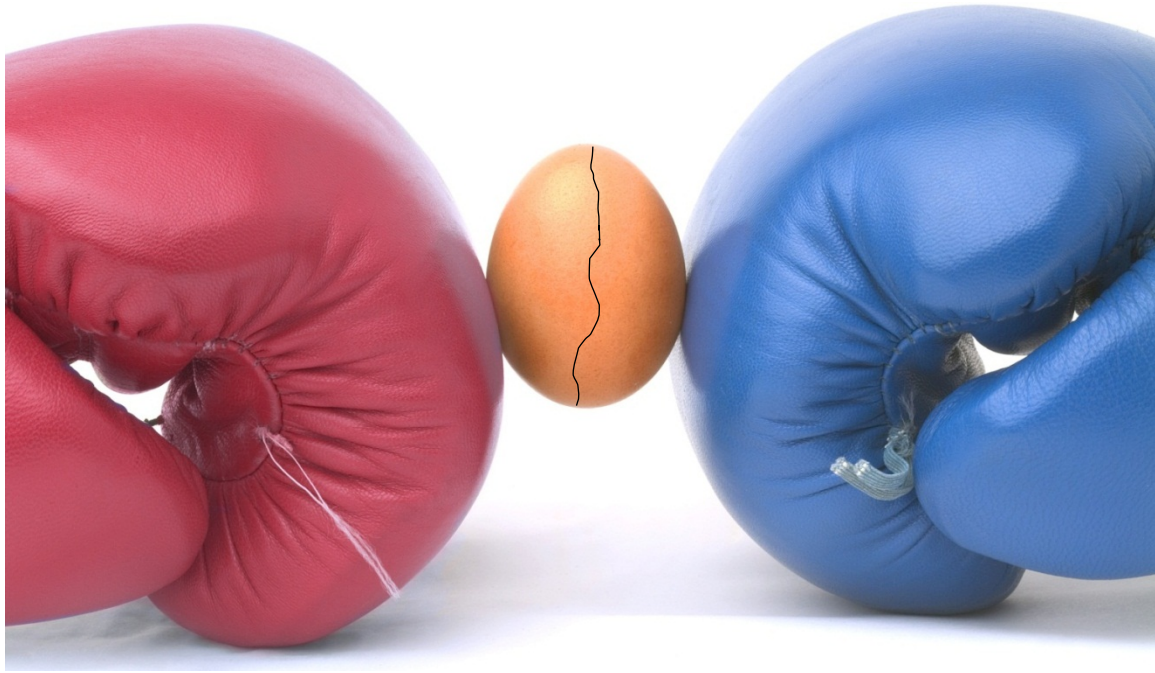
This is **NOT** the Right Picture!

Church Conflict



This is the picture we need to see.

The Picture Needs to Include the Destruction that Occurs to the Very Thing that is Being Fought Over



**Beyond the *PAIN* People Experience,
How Does Conflict Damage *Ministry*?**

In the Church

many people, when they first enter into conflict, are unaware of the damage that will occur to the ministry of the church.

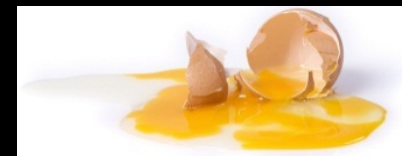
Here is what can happen...





Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing
That is Being Fought Over



Ministry is Neglected





Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing
That is Being Fought Over



Factions Grow Within the Body





Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing That is Being Fought Over



“ What happened in the nominating committee last night was bald-faced character assassination....

“Today Joan is still at it, spreading her poisonous lies about Sheila all over the congregation.”

Gossip, Half-Truths, and Lies Deepen the Divide





Church Conflict

**Damaging the Very Thing
That is Being Fought Over**



Friendships End in Betrayal



**“I wasn’t
prepared
for the
level of
treachery
mounted
against us”**



Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing That is Being Fought Over



Meetings Become Battle Grounds



“I have seen church meetings go from from civil to chaos in a matter of a few comments (minutes).”



Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing That is Being Fought Over



Members Leave



Research: **Most Frequent Response**



Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing That is Being Fought Over



Members Leave



Jesus: “...strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”



Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing
That is Being Fought Over



Financial Loss



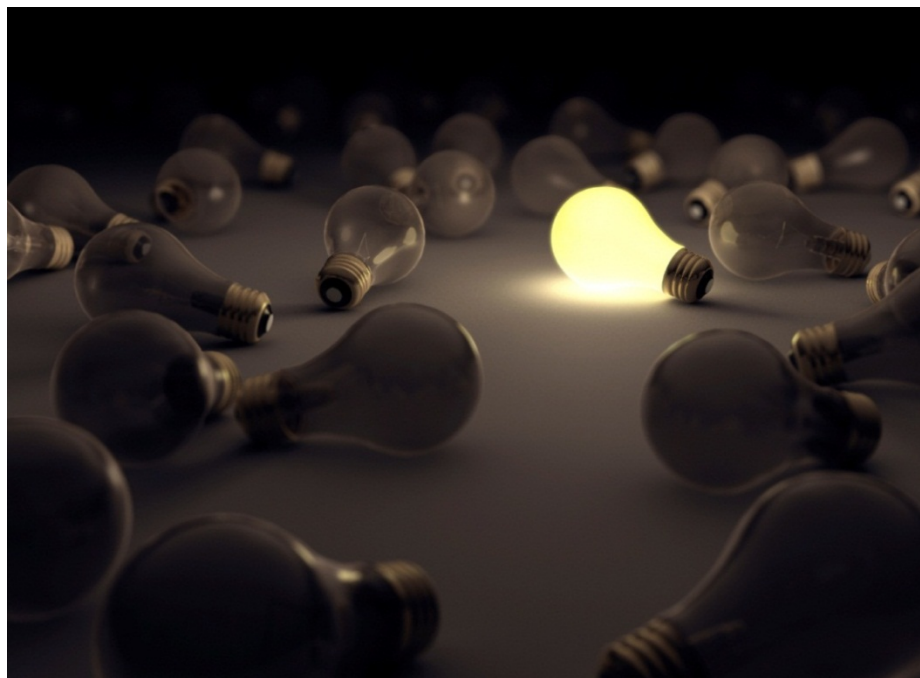


Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing That is Being Fought Over



Curtailment of Ministries



“Members were not willing to serve and support the church in a normal manner.”



Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing
That is Being Fought Over



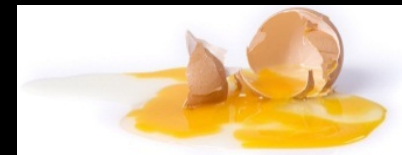
Ministry Burdens Increase





Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing That is Being Fought Over



Morale Plummet



**“I am very hurt
and
disillusioned”**



Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing That is Being Fought Over



Evangelism and Outreach are Undermined

**“Ministry outside
the walls of our
church could do
nothing but
almost come to a
complete halt . . .”**



**“. . . with the
majority of
people, (both
in the church
and outside)
talking and
thinking about
the ‘Major
Conflict....’**



Church Conflict

**Damaging the Very Thing
That is Being Fought Over**



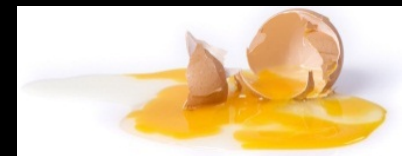
The Next Generation Drops Out of the Church





Church Conflict

Damaging the Very Thing That is Being Fought Over



After the Conflict and Dust Settles

**“Many members
now have a
barrier between
themselves and
other Christians
who have been
friends for many
years.”**



**“My ability
to trust
people had
been
severely
damaged
by what
happened.”**



Church Conflict

**Damaging the Very Thing
That is Being Fought Over**



Worship is Adversely Impacted



**“I don’t know how
I can worship with
the hurtful things
that those who
remain have said.”**

The Impact of Church Conflict



Is huge both on an individual level and on a corporate level.

The scope of the problem is larger than most people realize.



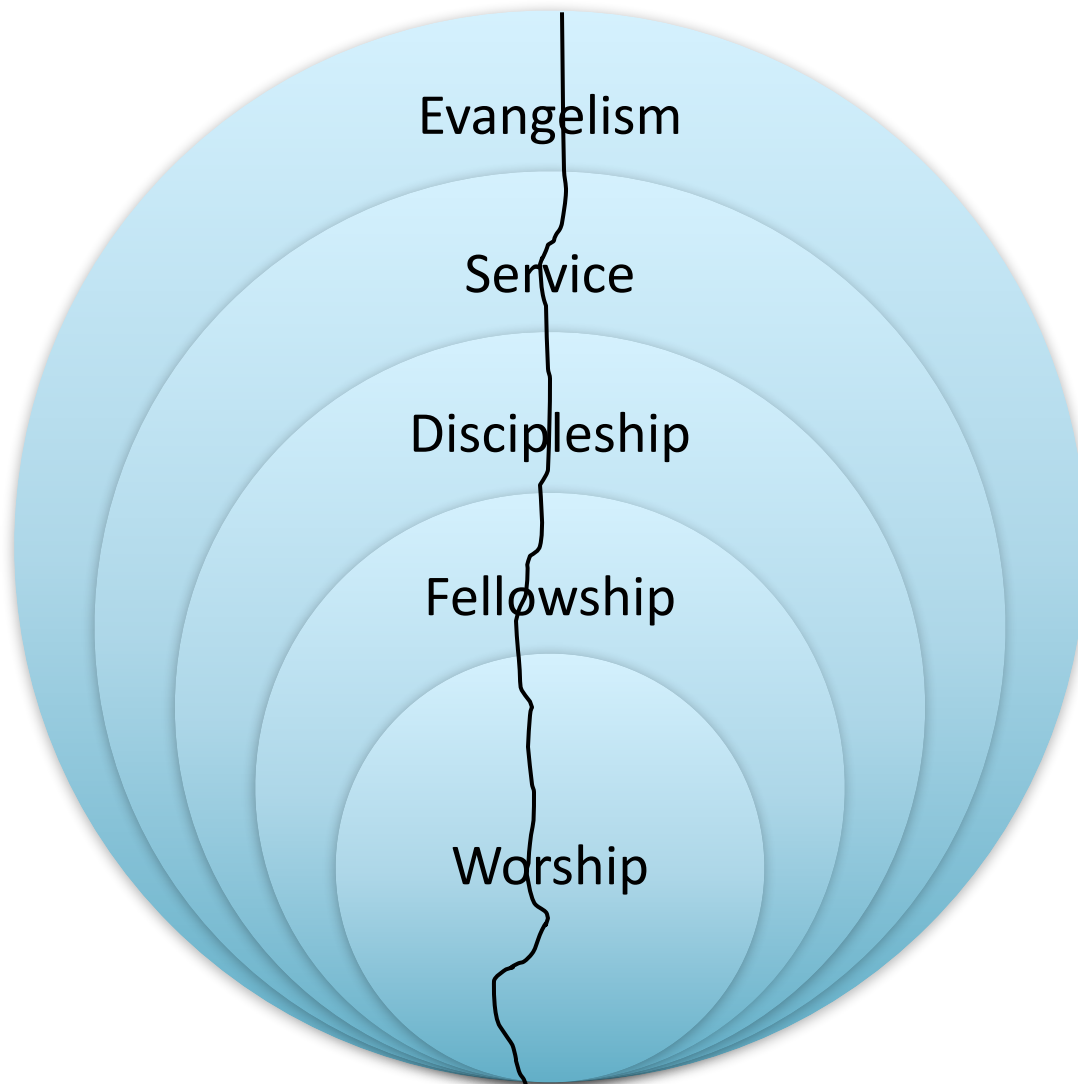
The Scope

From 2000 on

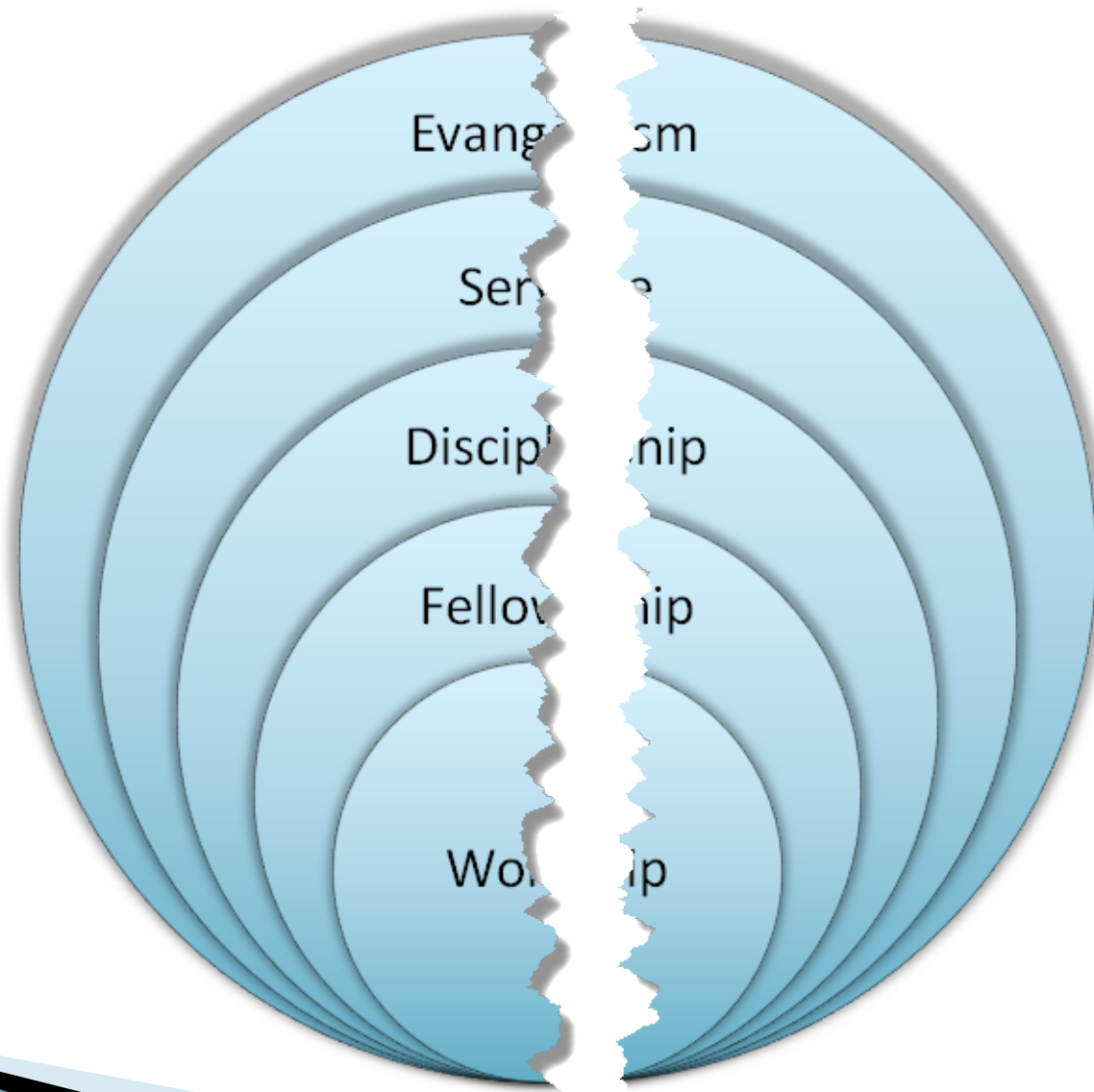
↓ decreases in
attendance have
been widespread

**“The median size of the congregation decreased in
nearly every Christian denominational group
over the period.”**

What
Starts
off
as
a
Crack



May Rip through a Church's Entire Ministry



There is a larger community that is directly affected.



One pastor sadly described the outcome of conflict in his church. “In the end, what had been a growing, vibrant ministry was decimated.”

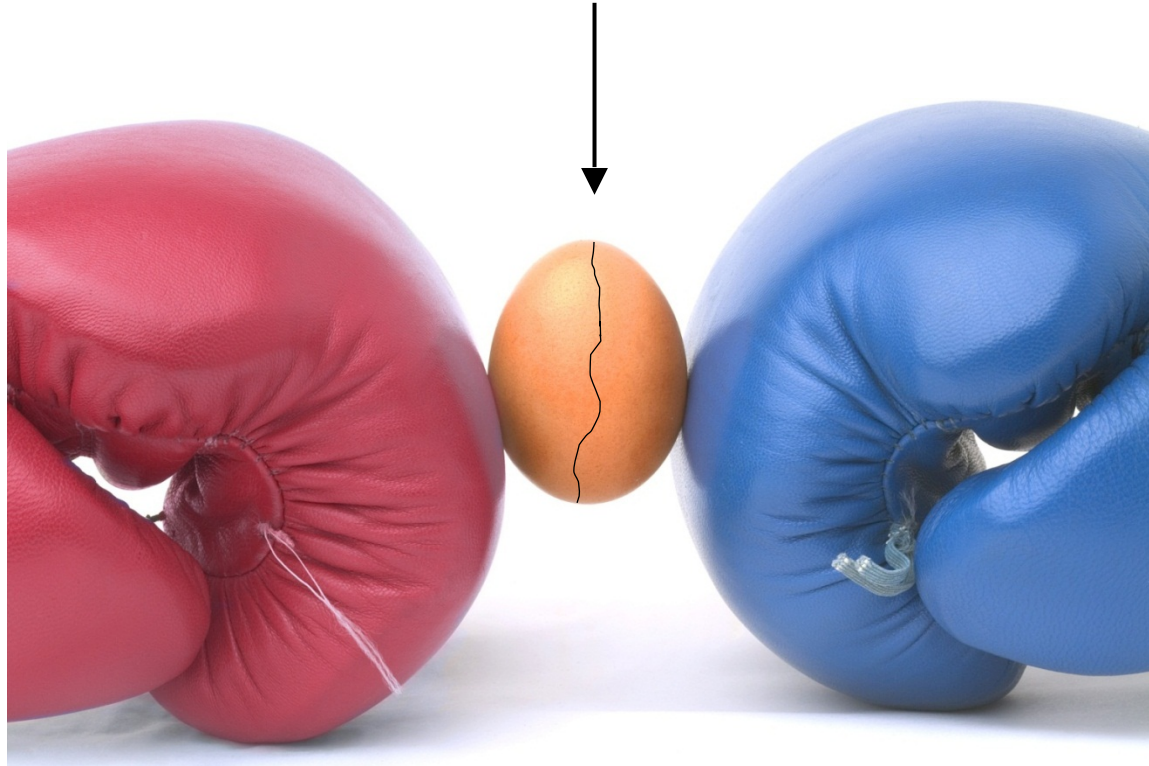
How a Church Addresses Conflict is of Utmost Importance!

OUTLINE



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Pivotal Moment



When It First Appears

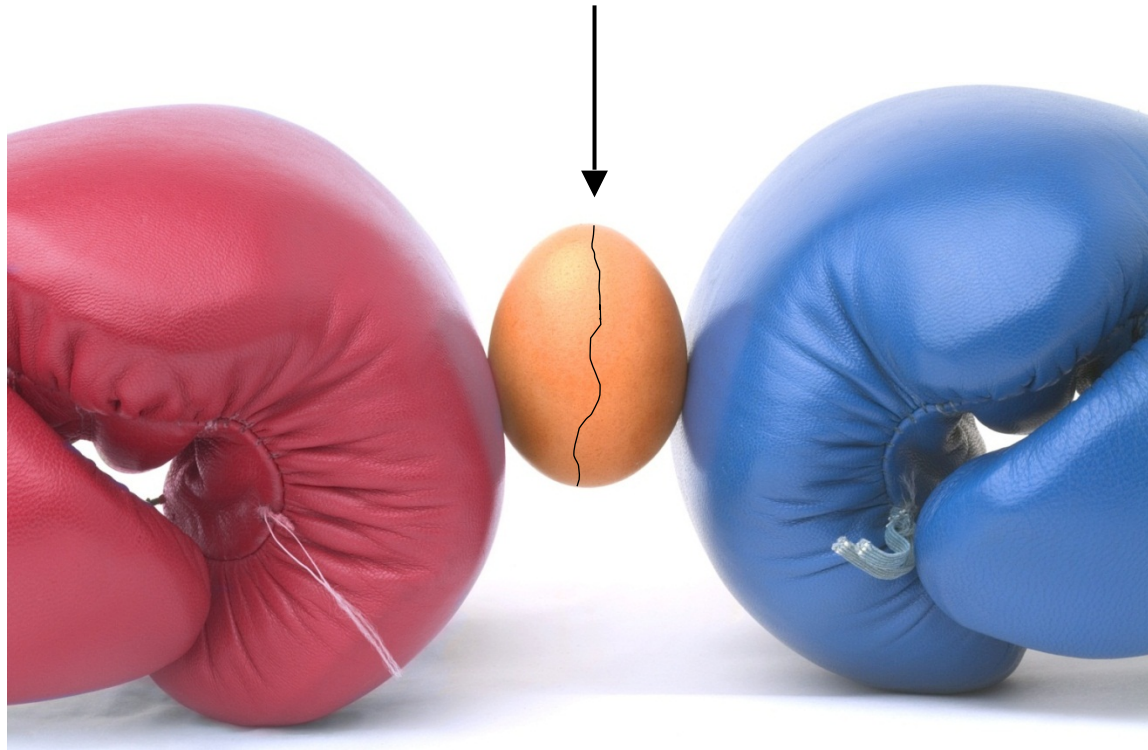
How Do Most Churches Deal with It?



***"It has
always been the
unwritten policy
of our church to
ignore conflict
hoping it will go
away."***

Ignoring Conflict Does Not Work

Pivotal Moment



What Should You Do When
Conflict First Emerges?



Let's be more specific.

This is a
Pivotal Moment



What do you do when two members have spoken directly to each other over an issue causing tension, but the issue and tension persist?

What's the



PLAN?

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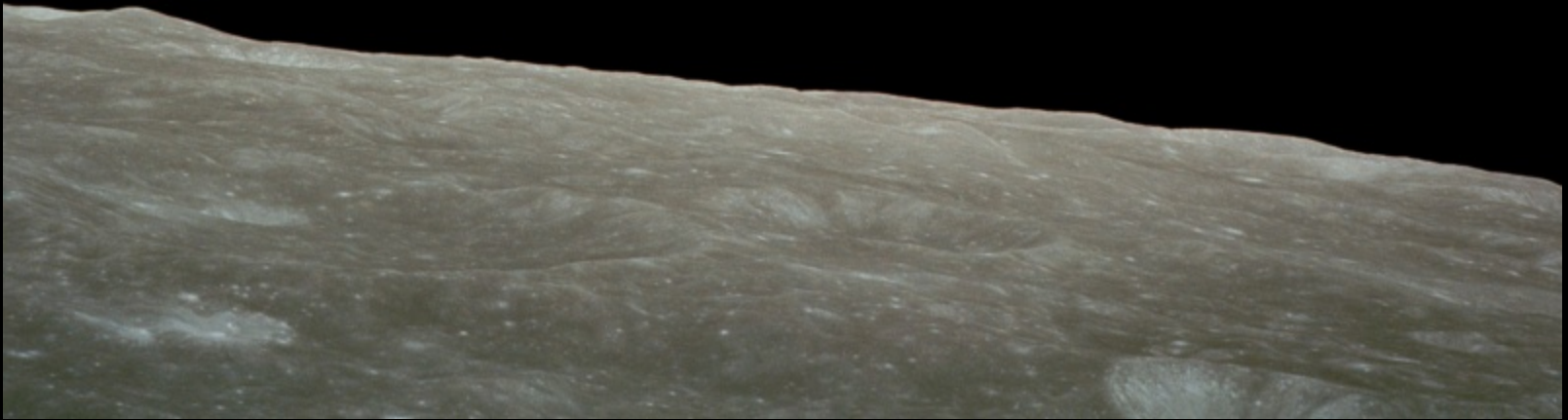
Discovering That Very Best Way

Two Essential Questions



- **1. WHAT do you do?**
- 2. WHEN do you do it?**

Let's Enlarge Our View by Considering



God's Pattern of Peacemaking with Us

The

God Conflict

- Is holy
- Is righteous and just
- Is pure, unsullied by any hint of evil
- Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts (Is. 6:3)
- The Lord is righteous in all his ways (Ps 145:17)



Man

- Created in God's image
- Image became corrupted
- We all deviate from his will
- "There is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins" (Eccl. 7:20 NASB)
- "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Romans 1:18)

OUTCOME



We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ Rom. 5:1

Billions of People

"I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part"

1 Cor. 11:18

OUTCOME

God

The Challenge:
Conflict
with **Humanity**

People

The Challenge:
Conflict with
Each Other



HOPE IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT

Making Peace with Others
the Way
God Makes Peace with Us

Introducing the
Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking

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Undergirding the Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking is the **premise** that the plan God uses to make peace with us



is the same plan we should
follow to make peace
with each other.

The Biblical Basis for this premise is found in Mat. 5:9.

Jesus taught:

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons of God.**

What does it mean to be a “son of God”?

It means *like father, like son*.



Mat. 5:9b
is the key that
unlocks the door
to the model.



The key comes in
the form of a
question.

**If we want to be like God in the area of peacemaking
how does God make peace with us?**



Answering this key question yields
The Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking



**Making Peace with Others
the Way God Makes Peace with Us**



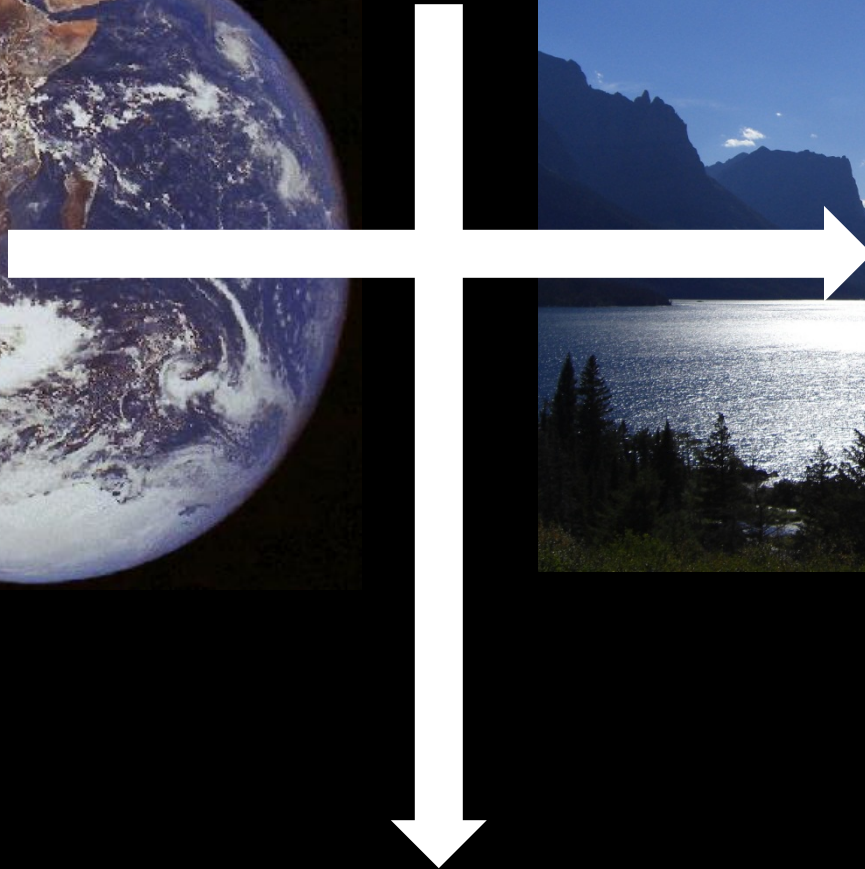
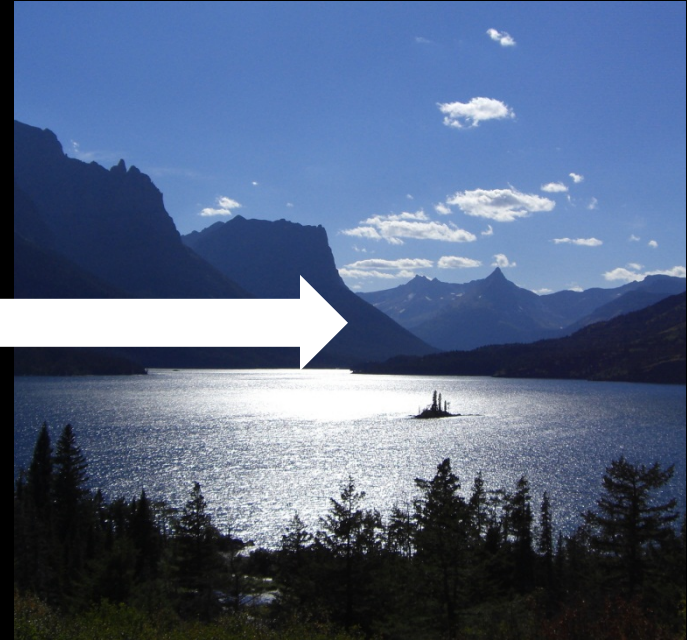
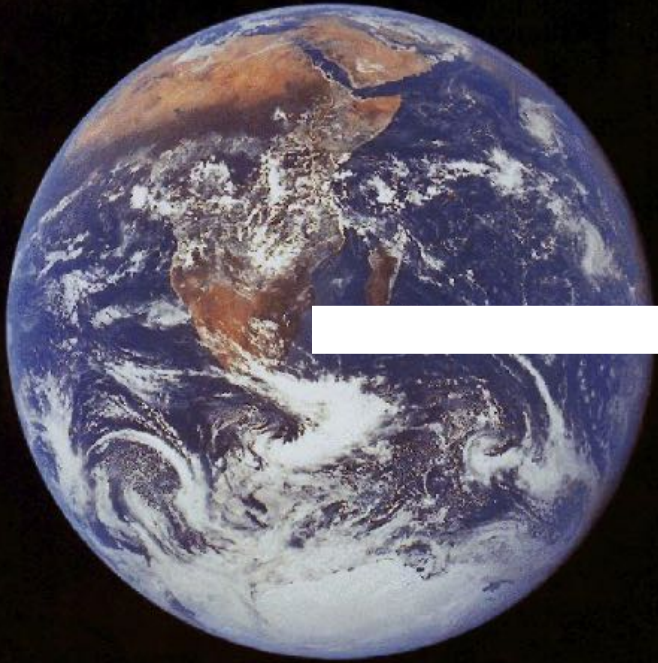
What do you do ?



**when you have spoken
directly to another member
over an issue causing
tension, but the issue and
tension persist?**

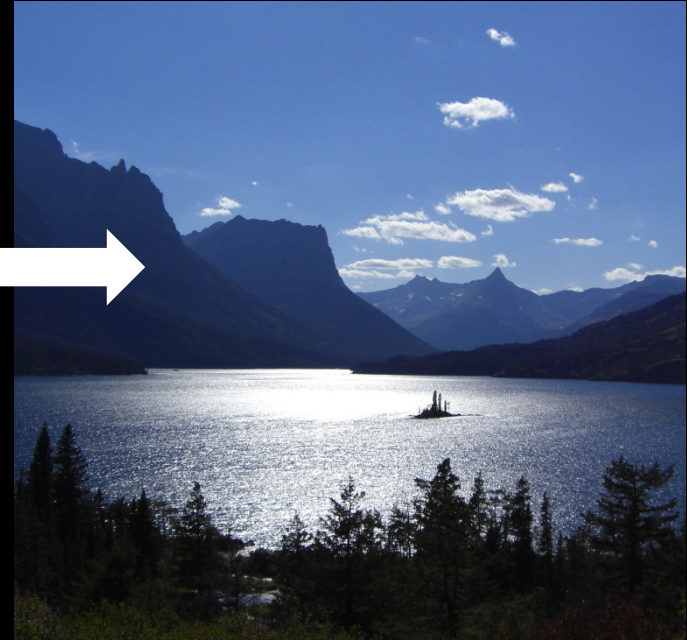
**Pivotal
Moment**

The Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking



The Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking

*For there is one God, and there is one mediator
between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*



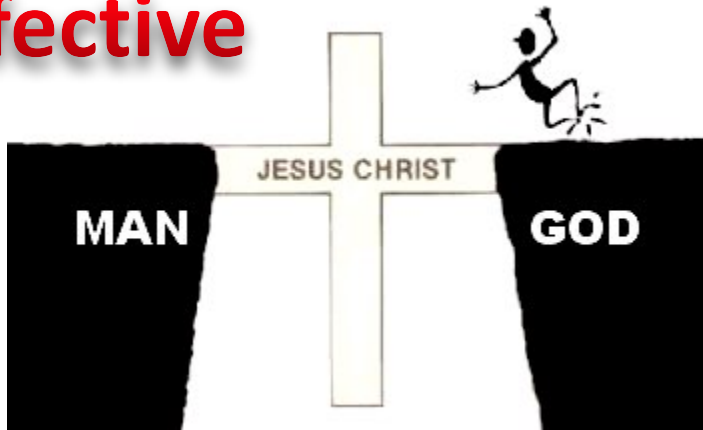
Love is the Basis

Reconciliation is the Goal

Mediation is the Means

Like Father, Like Son

Effective



Peace with God



Effective

Peace with Each Other

Addressing Church Conflict

Two Essential Questions



1. WHAT do you do?

➔ **2. WHEN do you do it?**



*Jesus is the
“Lamb that was slain
from the foundation of
the world”* Rev. 13:8

GOD

WHEN did God adopt his plan of salvation for us,
before or after we personally entered into conflict with Him?

Fall

our personal sins

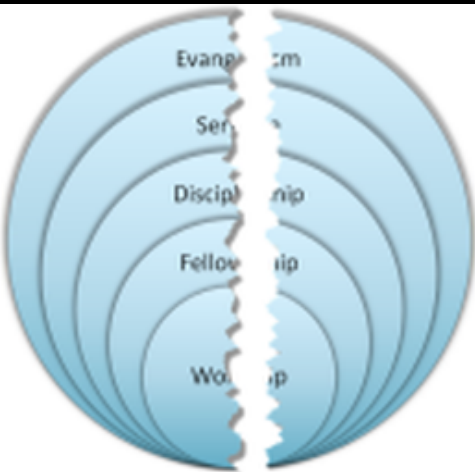
Creation

Life of Christ

Today

Final Judgment

when should it implement its peacemaking plan,
before or after conflict emerges?



When do most churches actually begin to address conflict, before or after it begins to do damage?

If God devised a plan to deal with conflict before it emerged, why don't we?



Church leaders need to develop the plan for peace *before* members experience conflict with each other – *before* that *pivotal moment* when conflict first emerges.



Not only do we need to make peace with each other the *same way* God made peace with us,



Church leaders need to develop the plan for peace **before** members experience conflict with each other.

God Put His Plan in Place



Not only do we need to make peace with each other the **same way** God made peace with us,

Before We Needed It

... where sin increased, grace abounded all the more Rom. 5:20

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SHALOM!



The Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking and the First Responders Initiative, Part 2

From Theology to Reality

A Conflict Occurs



Attempt to Resolve Issue Privately



One on One Attempt

What do you do when you have spoken directly with the other person but the problem is still not resolved?

This is a Pivotal Moment!

First Responders



get involved when church members have not been able to work out an issue on their own.

First Responders



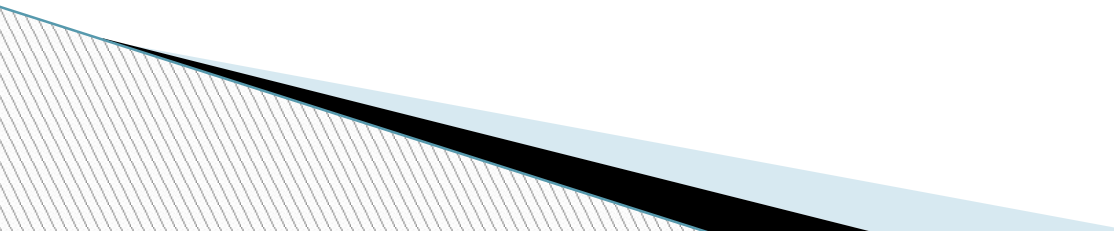
They are selected church members who have been trained in **“informal peacemaking”**

Biblical Example of Informal Peacemaking

Acts 9

26 And when he [Saul] had come to Jerusalem, he **attempted to join** the disciples. And they were all **afraid** of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he [Saul] **went in and out among them** at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.



This is Not Hard to Do



Illustration:

**Peer Mediation
in Public Schools**

71-100% success rate

In the church, an informal peacemaker requires:

- (1) a knowledge of the JCMP**
- (2) basic peacemaking skills.**

If kids can do this, so can adults!

First Responders: **Characteristics**



**= variety of people
not number needed**

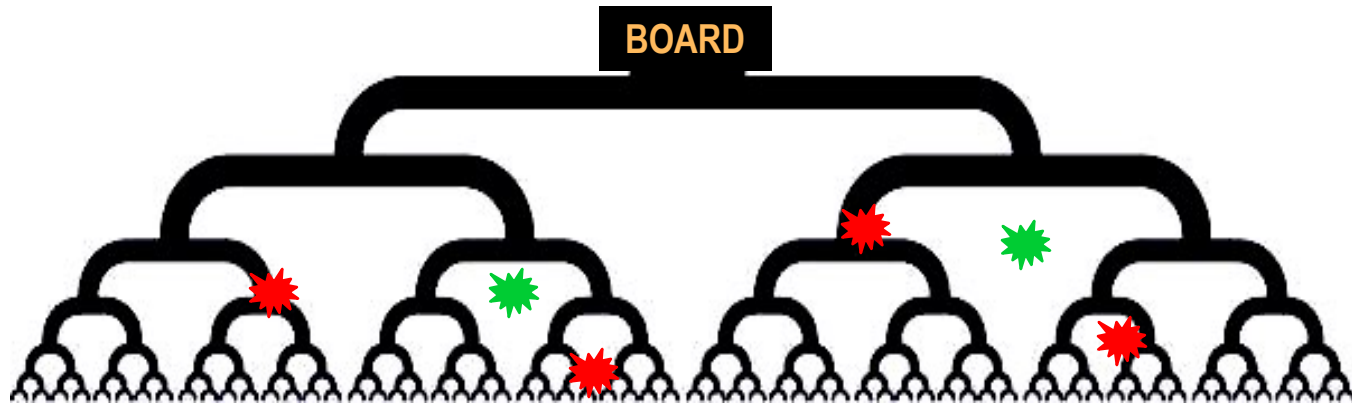
- ▶ Interested in the work
- ▶ Trusted by members
- ▶ Know how to listen
- ▶ Able to keep confidences
- ▶ Tend to be supportive and non-judgmental
- ▶ Are not in a position of authority

First Responders: **Peacemaker Role**



- ▶ **Informal, Off the Record Role**
- ▶ **Independent**
- ▶ **Impartial**
- ▶ **Confidential**

The First Responders Initiative



**They are third party peacemakers,
who are closer to the situation than leaders.**

**They are delegated the task of addressing, containing,
and resolving conflicts as they emerge.**

The First Responders Initiative is Supported by

The Jethro Principle



First Responders



**Most disputes will
be resolved at this
stage.**

Some will not.

What then?

The Director of the First Responders Initiative

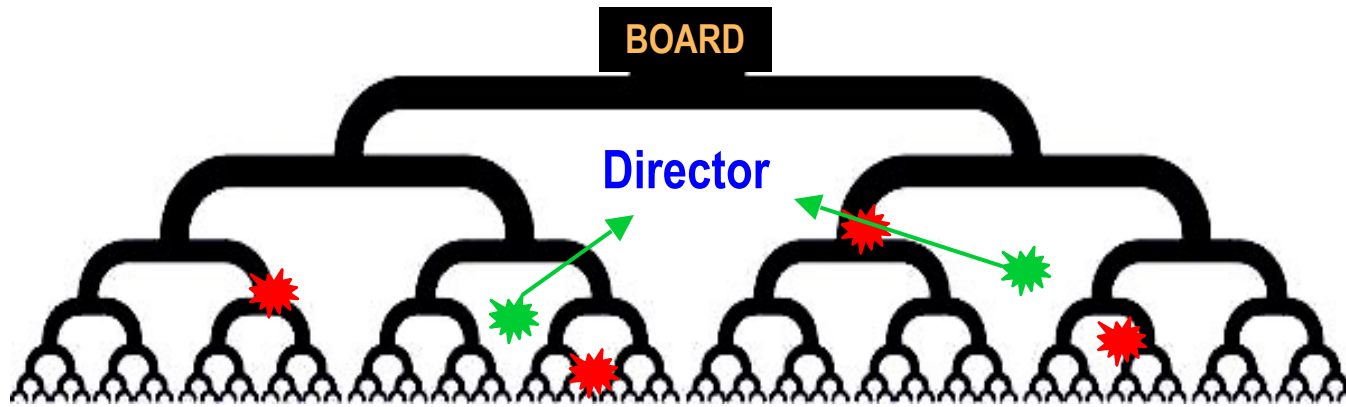
The Coordinator of a New Ministry



The Director is pivotal person who plays **3 Important Roles:**

- (1) Formal Mediator
- (2) Church Board Feedback Resource
- (3) Point Person for Member Concerns of Any Type

Director of the FRI – (1) Formal Mediator



**The Director of the First Responders Initiative
will mediate those cases that were not
resolved by a First Responder**

Unresolved Cases Go the Director of the First Responders Initiative



The director takes the disputing parties through a more formal peacemaking process, with greater analysis of the conflict's contributing factors.

Not all conflict is solely due to personalities



Become Part of *Our* Church Family

How can this be a cause of conflict?

The differences in the **cultural values** and **norms** we bring into our relationships are usually invisible until they are violated.

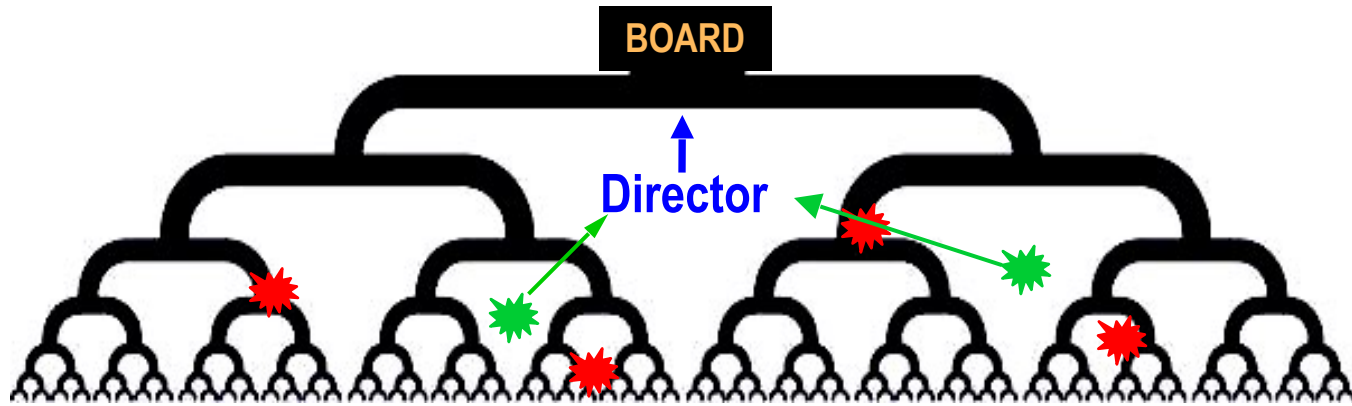
**1st Century: Peter, Cornelius,
and Jewish Culture**

Because the Church is Open to All, There will be Cultural Differences



In each local church
a “melding of minds” is required

Feedback Resource



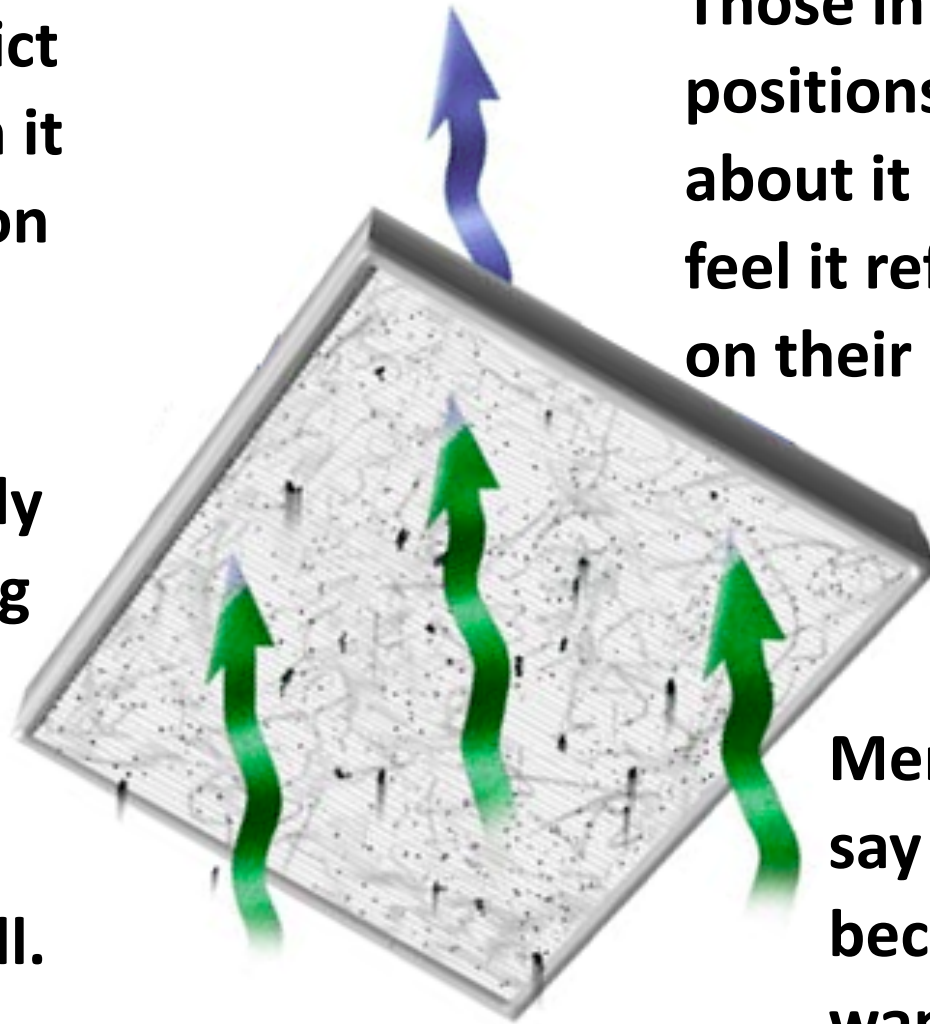
The Director is a conduit to provide feedback to the leadership of **resolved and unresolved conflicts**. This allows leaders to gain a fuller picture the inner workings of congregational life

Why Is This So Important?

Bad News Gets **Filtered Out** on the Way Up

People in conflict try to deal with it and contain it on their own.

Leaders typically don't go looking for bad news because their plates are already very full.





Those in subordinate positions don't talk about it because they feel it reflects badly on their competency.

Members don't say anything because they don't want to "rock the boat."

**Your
Experience?**

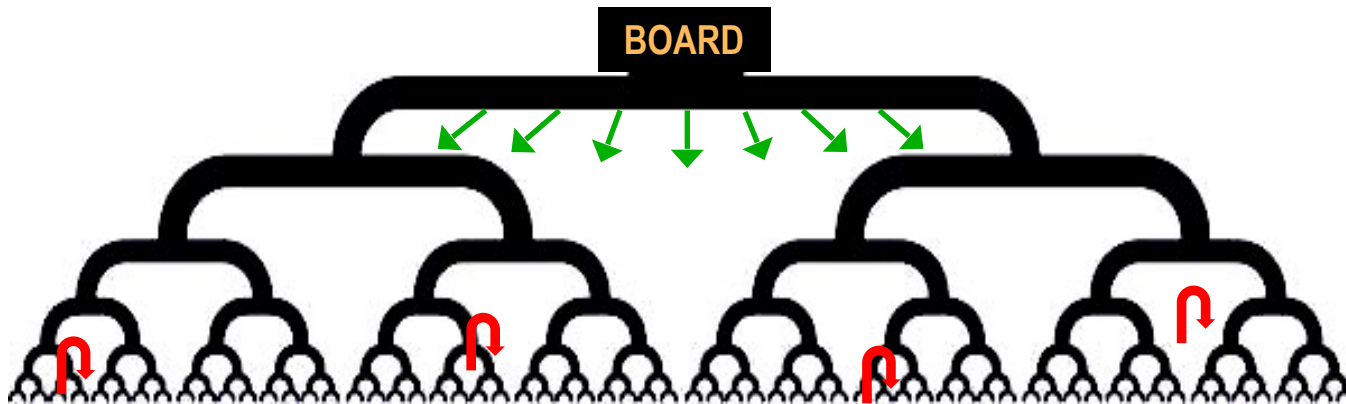
Formal Feedback in the Church is Minimal

Leadership Down	Member Up
Bulletin inserts	Congregational meetings
Pulpit announcements	Surveys
Emails	
Newsletters	
Prayer chains	
Phone tree	
Formal letters	



**Consider, as well, the difference in the frequency
and amount of information conveyed by each**

Formal Feedback in the Church is Minimal



As a general arrangement for congregational vitality
this is an unhealthy pattern

Nor does this reflect “Servant Leadership”

This Can Have Disastrous Results

3 ... and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam,
4 **“Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.”** 5 He said to them, “Go away for three days, then come again to me.” So the people went away.

6 Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the **old men** . . .

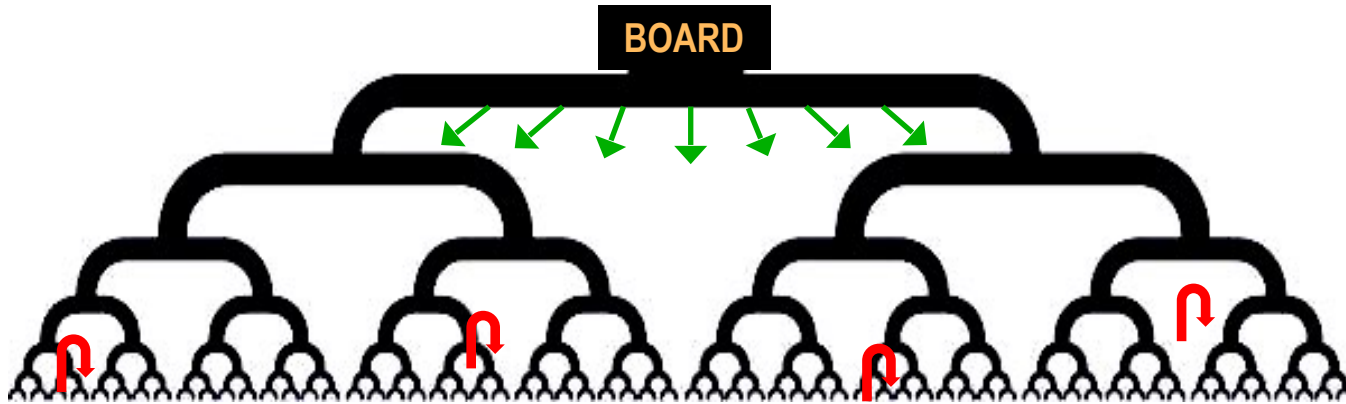
8 But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the **young men** who had grown up with him and stood before him.

10 thus shall you say to them, **‘My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs.** 11 And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’” . . . 15 So the king **did not listen** to the people

The Kingdom Divided

. . . 19 **So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.**

Formal Feedback in the Church is Minimal



As a general arrangement for congregational vitality
this is an unhealthy pattern

and It is a Problem !

What a Healthy Church Looks Like

Vision / Mission for the church is cast

Bylaws, Policies and Procedures are set

Ministry is carried out by staff and members

CONFLICT inevitably emerges

Pre-Determined Plan?

If **YES** reconciliation is likely to be the result

If
NO
a downward
cycle of
escalating
problems
will develop



What a Healthy Church Looks Like

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The First Responders Initiative

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What a Healthy Church Looks Like

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The First Responders Initiative

If **YES** reconciliation is likely to be the result

Director reviews all contributory factors

Leaders receive feedback / recommendations

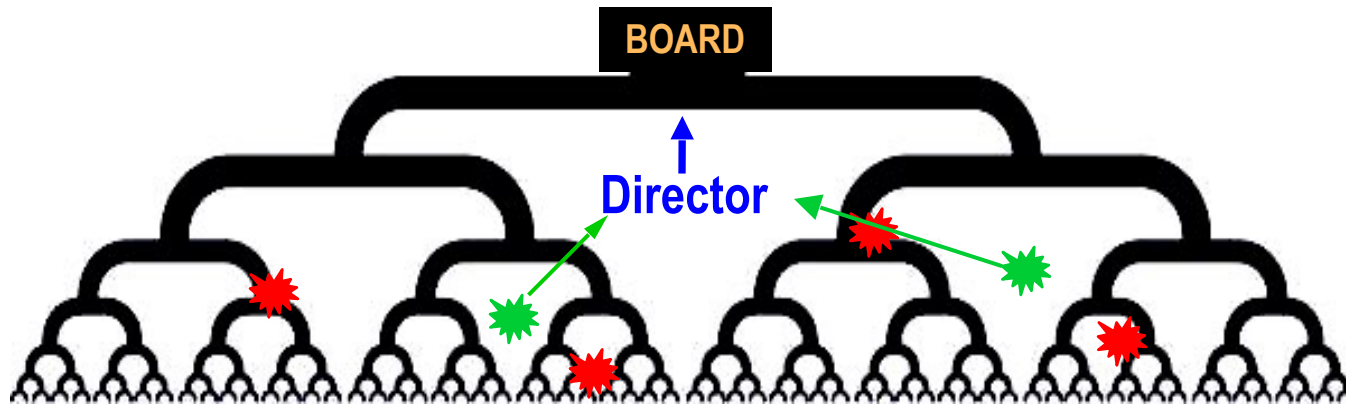
Bylaws, Policies & Procedure **reset** as needed

A Self-Correcting,
Self-Improving
System

If
NO
a downward
cycle of
escalating
problems
will develop



The First Responders Initiative Reflects the **Servant Leadership** Framework



The Director provides leadership a **formal “heads up”** to issues experienced by members of the church that they might otherwise be unaware of.

Director of First Responders Initiative



A good candidate: someone who is in the listening business OR one gifted and skilled in interacting with others

Personal Characteristics

Same characteristics as informal mediator, plus:

- ▶ Understands the church's structure, culture, & ministries
- ▶ Strong problem-solving skills
- ▶ Interacts well with leadership
- ▶ Able to promote Initiative to congregation
- ▶ Able to teach others

Director of First Responders Initiative



Addl. Training Involves:

- ▶ A deeper understanding of the Judeo-Christian model and conflict resolution
- ▶ Learning organizational conflict and analysis
- ▶ Guidance into more formal processes of (face-to-face) mediation, including problem-solving skills and a solution-focused orientation

What a Healthy Church Looks Like

Vision / Mission for the church is cast

Policies and Procedures are set

Ministry is carried out by staff and members

CONFLICT inevitably emerges

Is There a Pre-Determined Plan?

If **YES** reconciliation is likely to be the result

Director reviews all contributory factors

Leaders receive feedback / recommendations

Bylaws, Policies & Procedure reset as needed

A Self-Correcting,
Self-Improving
System

If
NO
a downward
cycle of
escalating
problems
will develop



But What If...

But What If the Dispute is Still Not Resolved?

What Do You Do Then?



A Quick Review

Participants Have Now Had Three Opportunities to Make Peace

- ▶ Among themselves
- ▶ First Responders
- ▶ Director of the F.R. Initiative

What do you do if a dispute is still not resolved?

Only the most difficult cases persist to this stage.



A Judgment is Rendered by the Church's Governing Board



**or the Appropriate Person or Group
in Authority**

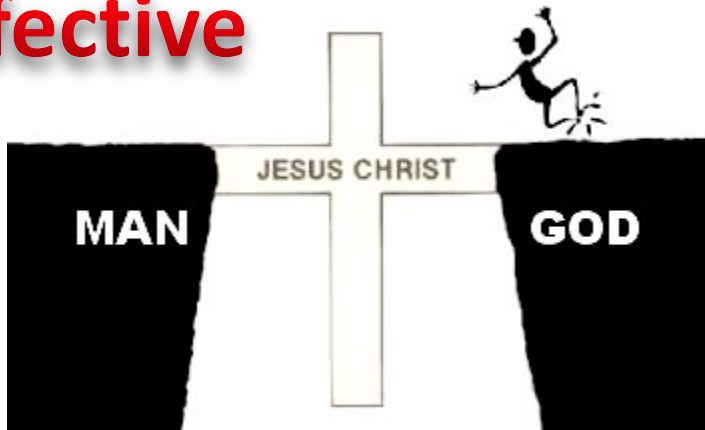
The Centerpiece of the Initiative are Third Party Peacemakers



Churches now have the opportunity to make the
First response to conflict the Right response!

Like Father, Like Son

Effective



**Spiritual
Healing**

Reconciliation



Effective

**Social
Healing**

Reconciliation

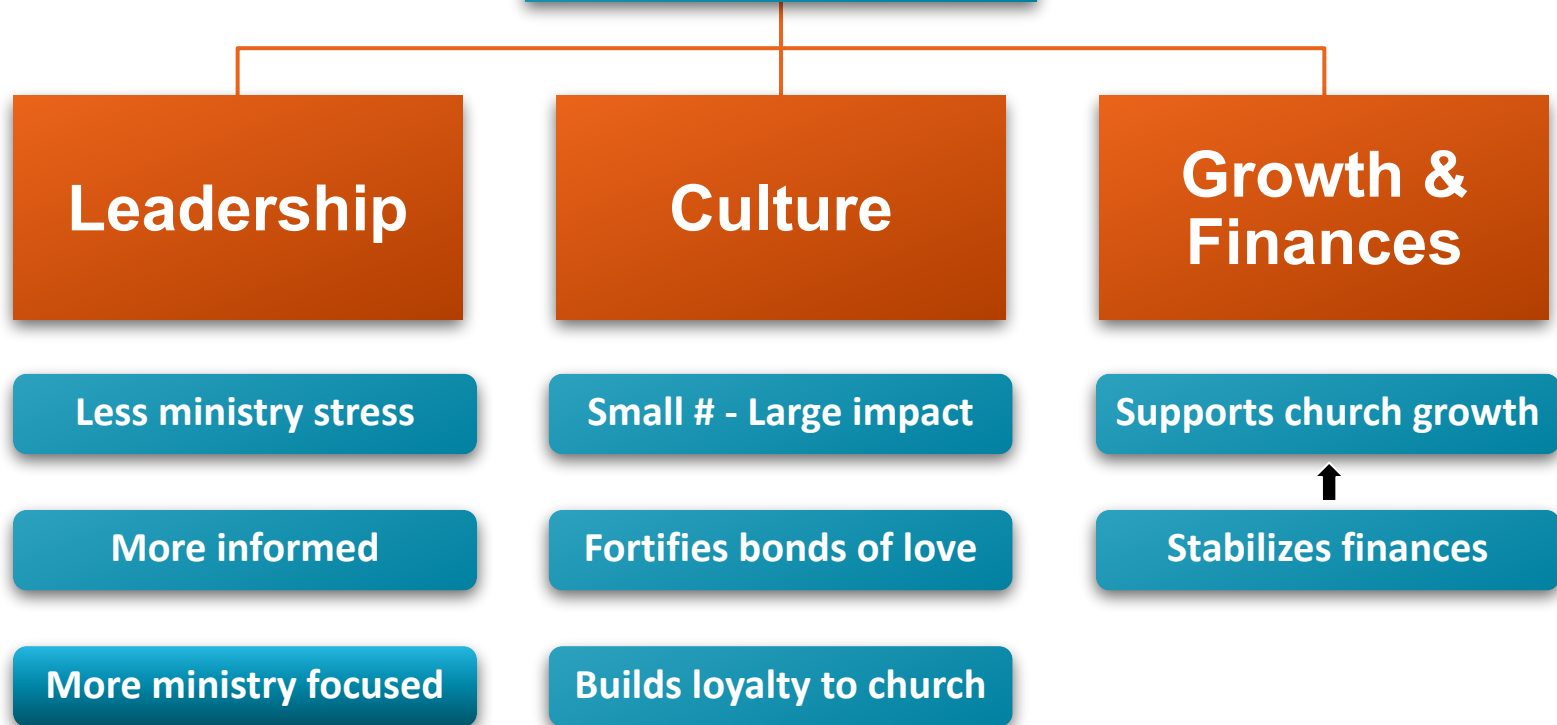
The First Responders Initiative



**It is like leaven in bread.
Just a little makes the whole dough rise.**

**With a few trained individuals (YOU) will have
a profound impact on the entire congregation.**

Benefits



Research shows that “serious conflict is the number one predictor of congregational decline” and that “the strongest correlate of **growth**... was the presence or absence of conflict.” *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*

“The research supports the conclusion that only as churches carefully use conflict management strategies can church growth strategies facilitate **sustained growth**.”
Dr. Jeffrey Gaskins, Doctoral Dissertation

Benefits

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graph TD; Benefits[Benefits] --- Leadership[Leadership]; Benefits --- Culture[Culture]; Benefits --- Growth[Growth & Finances]; Leadership --- L1[Less ministry stress]; Leadership --- L2[More informed]; Leadership --- L3[More ministry focused]; Culture --- C1[Small # - Large impact]; Culture --- C2[Fortifies bonds of love]; Culture --- C3[Builds loyalty to church]; Growth --- G1[Supports church growth]; Growth --- G2[Stabilizes finances];
```

Leadership

Less ministry stress

More informed

More ministry focused

Culture

Small # - Large impact

Fortifies bonds of love

Builds loyalty to church

Growth & Finances

Supports church growth

Stabilizes finances



Research shows that the income was “good or excellent” in more than twice as many churches that had no serious conflict compared to those that did.



then for your church to emulate

**Establishing a Plan Before
Conflict Emerges**

When



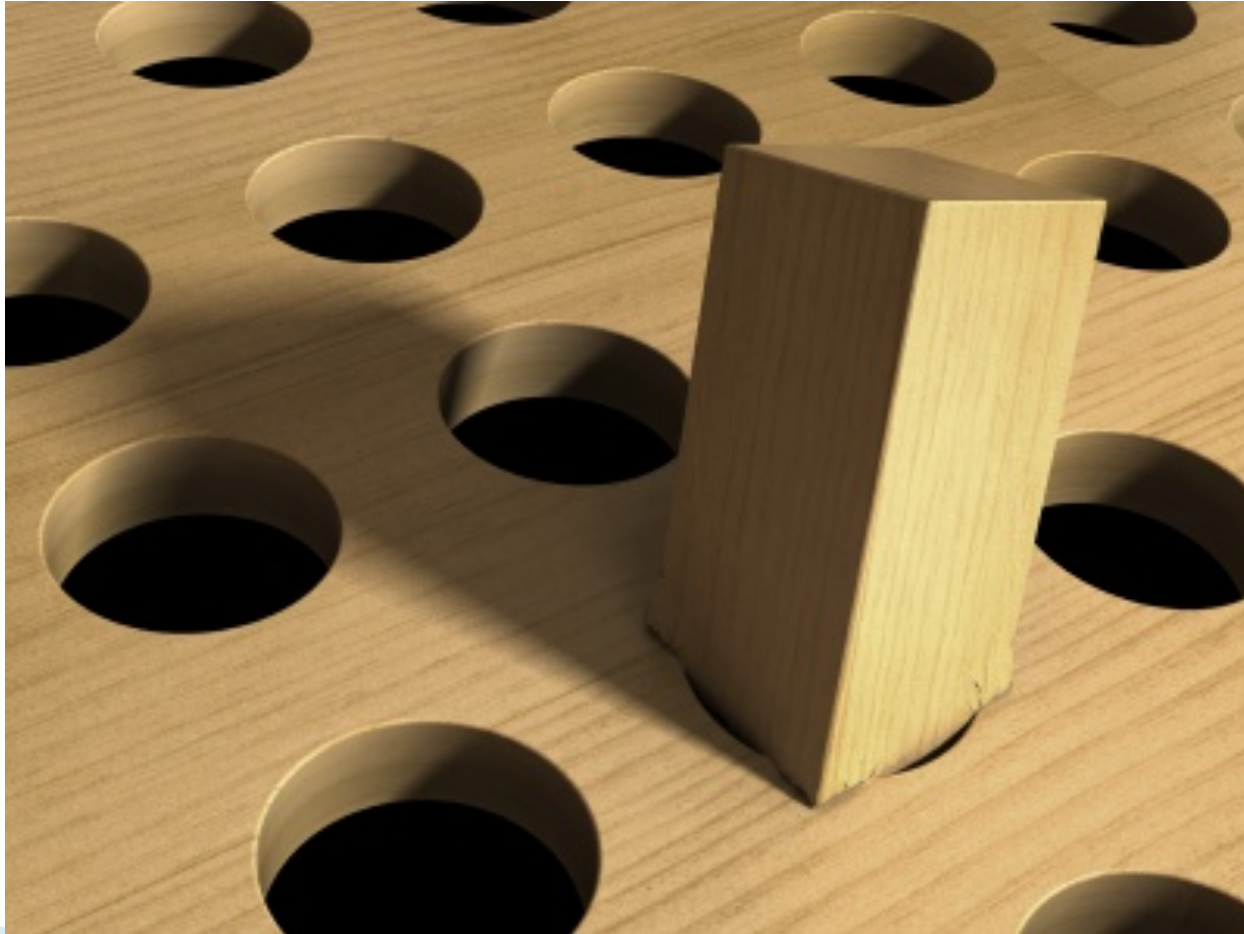
God's pattern of peacemaking

**Using the JCMP
After Conflict Emerges**

What

Matthew 18:15-17

The Most Misapplied Passage on Church Conflict



Matthew 18

(**If... then...** If this is true, then do this)

15 “**If** your brother sins against you, **go** and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. **If** he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

16 But **if** he does not listen, **take** one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

17 **If** he refuses to listen to them, **tell** it to the church. And **if** he refuses to listen even to the church, **let him be to you** as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Matthew 18 Applies Only When Two Conditions are Met

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graph TD; A[Matthew 18 Applies Only When Two Conditions are Met] --> B[There is identifiable sin (v. 15)]; A --> C[There are witnesses of that sin (v. 16)];
```

**There is
identifiable
sin (v. 15)**

**There are
witnesses of
that sin (v. 16)**

Who are These Witnesses?

“If your brother sins against you...”

Do these
words apply
if your
brother
doesn't sin
against you?



Matthew 18

It is Commonly Taught that Witness = “mediator”
which includes these roles:

1. Intercessor
2. Convener
3. Facilitator of communication and understanding
4. Model
5. Referee and protector
6. Trust builder
7. Resource expander
8. Generator of alternatives
9. Reality tester
10. Teacher and counselor
11. Encourager and coach
12. Confronter and exhorter
13. Proclaimer of forgiveness
14. Closer
15. Witness
16. Arbitrator
17. Reconciler

Jesus References the Old Testament in Mat. 18

Matthew 18

16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, *that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

Deuteronomy 19

15 “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. *Only on the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses shall a charge be established.*

Question . . .

What if There Was Only One Witness?



Would that be sufficient evidence to condemn?

Paul wrote, “¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the **evidence of two or three witnesses.** ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear” (I Tim. 5:19-20)

*these individuals
only witness the
charge of sin and not
the sin itself, then
any unsubstantiated
charge is sufficient
to knock every
pastor out of
ministry.*



One minister observed, “Many a pastor has had his ministry destroyed over accusations that could not be proven false, though they were.”

Matthew 18 Applies Only When Two Conditions are Met

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graph TD; A[Matthew 18 Applies Only When Two Conditions are Met] --> B[There is identifiable sin (v. 15)]; A --> C[There are witnesses of that sin (v. 16)];
```

There is
identifiable
sin (v. 15)

There are
witnesses of
that sin (v. 16)



If Mat. 18 cannot be used and there is conflict, the church should turn to the Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking



The Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking and the First Responders Initiative

Would such a model and lay led
ministry be of value to your church?

**We want to help by setting up a training series with Dr.
Newberger. Please sign up to indicate your interest.**



The Judeo-Christian Model of Peacemaking and the First Responders Initiative

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