

WHO'S UP FOR A...
'GOOD' FIGHT?



Working Through Conflict In Rural Ministry



The Rural Church Pastors Network
www.ruralchurchpastorsnetwork.com

Welcome!!

We are delighted you have taken time to make an investment in your life and leadership.

Twice a year the **Rural Church Pastors Network** creates events for rural pastors focusing on both relevant ministry matters and pastoral health and wellbeing issues. All events are designed by a team of seasoned and committed rural pastors who ensure each RCPN gathering offers a meaningful, relevant event that is not only encouraging, but can be used practically in your rural church setting as well.

This course isn't just about training however. Each RCPN event is designed as an 'experience' for sharing current reality in ministry, rich and warm fellowship, relational networking, and prayerful support.

If you haven't done so, we would invite you to visit the RCPN website (www.ruralchurchpastorsnetwork.com) and become a member of our network. It's the only one of its kind in Canada. We want you to not only be part of this movement of rural pastors that is growing rapidly, but to offer ideas and resources that will offer support and encouragement to other rural pastors just like you!!



Our Theme: Working through Conflict in Rural Ministry

As a rural pastor it is only a matter of time before you find yourself having to deal with conflict in your church family. Because of the close knit community that makes up the fabric of rural life, how you work through conflict may very well prove to be a defining moment in your pastoral ministry.

This course has been created in **MICROSOFT WORD** format, making it possible for you to personalize, modify and reproduce for use in your local church setting. We invite you to take this resource and create a meaningful tool that can be applied immediately to your local leadership context. Ongoing resource support is available from your RCPN Leadership Team upon request.

You can also enter an on line social connection with rural pastors through Facebook. 'Friend us'



at Rural Church Pastors Network ... keep in touch and dialogue with fellow rural pastors – by doing so you will help make our network what it is to become in the coming days. Close to 170 rural pastors have joined in one of our events representing 19 denominations.

We're glad you're here. We invite you Relax - Unwind and Feel at Home! Consider this a 'safe environment' where coming from a small church/community is part of the special calling that is ours as rural pastors! Let's have a great time together!

Our Goals for the Day

- To offer encouragement and support to pastors as they consider their current leadership challenges.
- To offer principles and provide tools in understanding and dealing with conflict when it arises in your rural ministry setting.
- To engage pastors in relevant conflict resolution based discussions believing there is a great deal we can learn from each other – from mistakes we have made and lessons we have learned along the way!
- To encourage networking between pastors for continued contact and accountability.

The Rural Church Pastors Network

In 2011, three rural pastors and their denominational ‘coach’ felt led by God to reach out to rural pastors in central Alberta offering opportunities to connect for fellowship, training and prayer.



Now, 2 ½ years later, a grass roots movement of rural pastors has expanded, encompassing 167 pastors from four provinces and nineteen denominations. It appears a real and pressing need has been uncovered, identified and addressed!!

The **Rural Church Pastors Network** is designed for rural pastors, offering hope, encouragement, and support to all pastors serving in a rural church setting.

In an attempt to keep up with the development of the RCPN, regional leadership teams of rural pastors are being developed to promote events in their own regions and to develop and strengthen ongoing relationships between semi-annual events.

To date the RCPN has been funded through donations from various churches, ministerials, private donors and denominational offices. It costs about \$500 to hold each event. Funding partners are invited to invest in the lives of rural pastors through the ministry of the RCPN. All financial gifts are tax deductible:

c/o RCPN/WDO

333 - 30 Springborough Blvd. SW Calgary Alberta T3H 0N9



Is Conflict Getting The Best of You?

The RCPN wants to express thanks to **Focus on the Family** for their deep commitment to support and encourage pastors. Please Visit our friends at www.focusonthefamily.ca for a full list of resources that will enrich your life, marriage, family and ministry.

In Crisis and in Need of Immediate Assistance 24/7?

Focus offers confidential counselling line at 1.888.5.CLERGY. Trained pastoral counsellors are ready to offer a listening ear and counsel to lighten your load.

Session I: Conflict: Are You Up for a ‘GOOD’ FIGHT?

What is ‘Conflict?’ It is the Stuff of Life

There is probably no greater need in rural leadership than to become proficient in the skill of conflict resolution. Let’s face it... Conflict is a common experience we know we will face on a regular basis in our ministry experience.

Conflict comes about when a person’s needs, values, behavior or motivations differ from another person they are in relationship with. What causes the actual ‘conflict’ to occur is when a person’s values or convictions are challenged or not taken seriously.

While at times we are able to appreciate our differences and complement each other, most of the time when it is a very important or sensitive issue to us, we enter into a cycle of conflict. The degree to which the issue ‘hooks us’ emotionally will determine the severity of the experience of conflict we are confronted with. Conflict is not so much a problem in and of itself - it is what we do with the conflict that counts the most.

Reflect and Share...

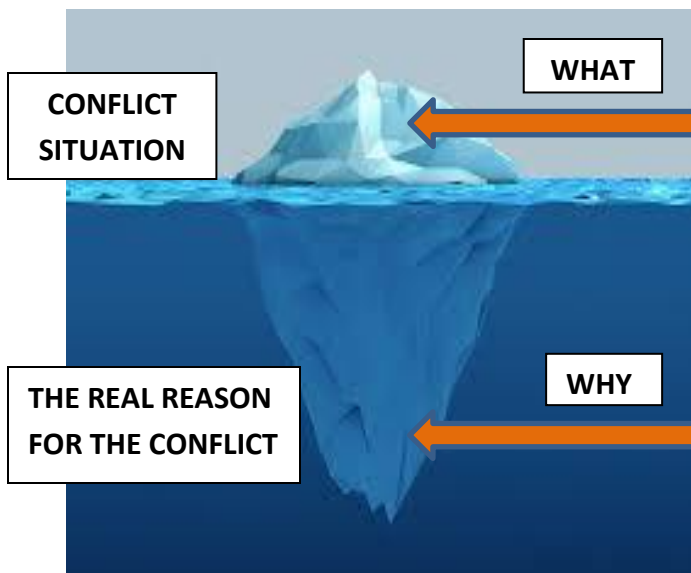
1. When was the last time you encountered conflict and how did you handle it?
2. To what extent are you facing conflict in your ministry at the present time?
3. Share potential conflict situations you can see/sense on the horizon of your ministry?



You can’t ignore conflict because it will not simply ‘go away.’ At times the tension in a situation or relationship will subside, but unless the root issue is understood and worked through, it is only a matter of time before the conflict manifests itself again... and this time with increased intensity and emotional fall out.

It is important we realize we must be proactive when we are aware of a situation of conflict in our ministry because whether we like it or not, conflicts demand our energy. In fact, an unresolved conflict will demand a tremendous amount of our attention and emotion. We all know how exhausting an unresolved conflict can be. While it is not always easy to ‘fix’ the problem the effort is worth the investment of your time, in fact, a great energy boost results when we do!

Lots to Learn About Conflict from an ICEBERG



Only 10% of an iceberg floats above the water. In the same manner only a small part of the actual conflict situation is 'visible.' This relates to the tension 'felt', the anger expressed, the 'awkward silence' experienced, and the obvious breakdown in relationship.

Just as the bulk of an iceberg remains submerged, so too in conflict the majority of the experience stems from what lies 'beneath' the surface where the 'real' conflict originates... values that are violated, convictions that are challenged, painful memories relived, fear of change, and differing expectations.

Reflect and Consider a recent conflict situation you experienced. On the lines below describe the conflict situation in light of the 'iceberg principle' shared above:

Visit our Website www.ruralchurchpastorsnetwork.com where you will find...

- ❖ Download audio files to offering insight to the uniqueness of being a rural pastor.
- ❖ Follow the blog of a rural pastor as he shares life and ministry experiences
- ❖ Download past RCPN event training resources to use with your church or local ministerial... How to Meaningfully Engage with your Community... How to Keep Balance Between Life and Ministry... Developing a Leadership Team that 'Works!' Staying in Rural Ministry when it Doesn't Make Much 'Cents' (financial matters)
- ❖ Find information on upcoming events
- ❖ Find Resources, Book Reviews and much more.
- ❖ Let Us Know How We Can Pray for You!
- ❖ Like Us on Facebook at **Rural Church Pastors Network** and keep connected to other rural pastors in your region.



Session II: Conflict Resolution Skills and Tools

Conflict Resolution skill and tools enable us to lead others in working through personal differences and to open up the possibility of future health. Conflict Resolution can draw people closer to others, as we jointly search for fair solutions and balanced needs. It involves a powerful shift from the posture of adversaries to co-operative partners. In this shift each person benefits.

Conflict Resolution Skills Create More Fulfilling Relationships

As a rural pastor, skillful conflict-handling is an important skill to develop in maintaining 'peace in the camp.' It is an important skill to develop in light of the deep relational ties and histories between families that have existed for generations. Conflict resolution can be seen as an opportunity to learn more about the values of people and also their history in relating to others and to issues that have surfaced in the past that continue to impact relational health today.

These skills are also the tools for building friendship and intimacy. A whole new level of trust develops as people learn "we can work it out."

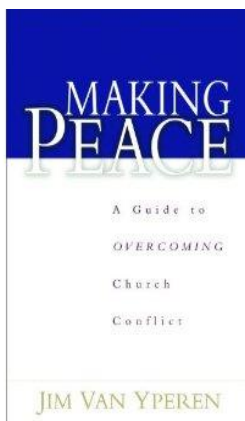
In our time together we will focus on two specific areas of conflict and resolution as follows:

1. Understand and Identify 5 Natural Responses to Conflict

Understand the natural default people take when faced with conflict in their life. We will explore the 5 basic responses – define them – help you identify which one is your natural default and consider how your response may change depending on which group of people you are with when the conflict occurs (ie... church board / family / spouse)

2. Develop a Process to Resolve Conflict

Develop a process by which you can work through a conflict situation in your church leadership position. The process is a framework for you to show both empathy and leadership in working through the situation at hand.



An investment in your life and ministry...

Because this issue of understanding and resolving conflict is a foundational principle in life and ministry, the RCPN wants to recommend this book ***Making Peace – A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict*** by Jim Van Yperen. “Conflict abounds in the church of Jesus Christ. Reconciliation within the body, however, will not happen with the right 'method' or 'set of principles.' In Making Peace, readers are challenged to place their church and all of its dissension under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” (www.amazon.com)

Understand and Identify 5 Natural Responses to Conflict

In the following pages we will define and explore 5 basic responses conflict, help you identify which one is your natural default and consider how your response may change depending on which group of people you are with when conflict occurs (ie... church board / family / spouse)

Understanding the Theory: Conflict Styles

In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. People typically have a preferred conflict resolution style.

Competitive: People who tend towards a competitive style take a firm stand, and know what they want. They usually operate from a position of power, drawn from things like position, rank, expertise, or persuasive ability. This style can be useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made fast; when the decision is unpopular; or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly. However it can leave people feeling bruised, unsatisfied and resentful when used in less urgent situations.

Collaborative: People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution; when there have been previous conflicts in the group; or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off.

Compromising: People who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something, and the compromiser him- or herself also expects to relinquish something. Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when equal strength opponents are at a standstill and when there is a deadline looming.



Accommodating: This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others, but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted. This person is not assertive but is highly cooperative. Accommodation is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party, when peace is more valuable than winning, or when you want to be in a position to collect on this "favor" you gave. However, people may not return favors, and overall this approach is unlikely to give the best outcomes.

Avoiding: People tending towards this style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. However in many situations this is a weak and ineffective approach to take.

The Thomas-Kilmann Behavioral Conflict Survey

Circle the “A” or “B” statement for each question which is most characteristic of your own behavior. In many cases, neither the “A” or “B” statement may be very typical of your behavior, but please select the responses which you would be more likely to use.

Transfer your scores to page 11/12 and once you have completed the survey, add up your scores and write them on the bottom of the page above each conflict behavioral style.

1. A. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
B. Rather than negotiate the things on which we disagree, I try to stress those things upon which we both agree.
2. A. I try to find a compromise solution.
B. I attempt to deal with all of his and my concerns.
3. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I might try to soothe the other’s feelings and preserve our relationship.
4. A. I try to find a compromise solution.
B. I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for the wishes of the other person.
5. A. I consistently seek the other’s help on working out a solution.
B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.
6. A. I try to avoid creating unpleasantness for myself.
B. I try to win my position.
7. A. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.
B. I give up some points in exchange for others.
8. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
9. A. I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.
B. I make some effort to get my way.
10. A. I am firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I try to find a compromise solution.
11. A. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
B. I might try to soothe the other’s feelings and preserve our relationship.
12. A. I sometimes avoid taking positions which would create controversy.

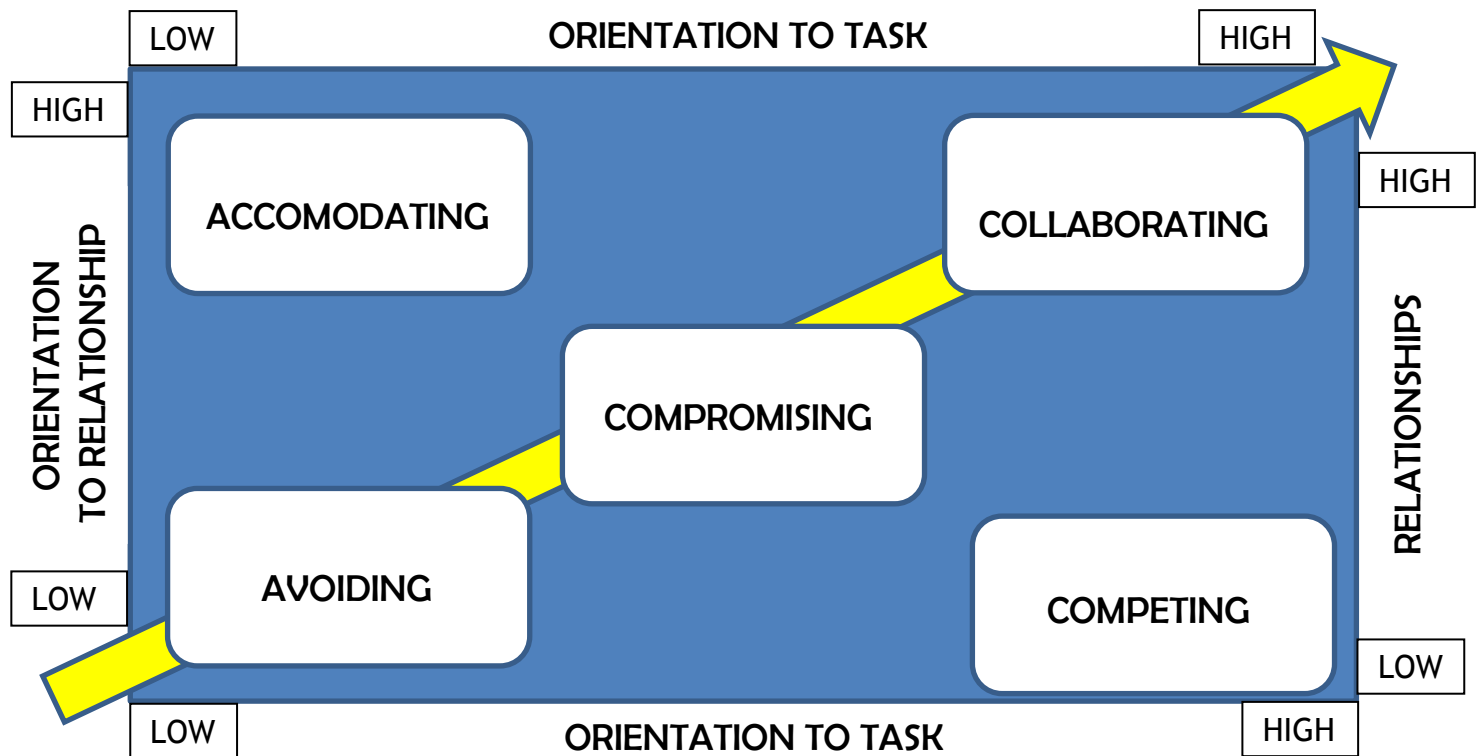


- B. I will let him have some of his positions if he lets me have some of mine.
13. A. I propose a middle ground.
B. I press to get my points made.
14. A. I tell him my ideas and ask him for his.
B. I try to show him the logic and benefits of my position.
15. A. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid tensions.
16. A. I try not to hurt the other's feelings.
B. I will try to convince the other person of the merits of my position.
17. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I will let him have some of his positions if he lets me have some of mine.
18. A. If it makes the other person happy, I might let him maintain his views.
B. I will let him have some of his positions if he lets me have some of mine.
19. A. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
B. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.
20. A. I attempt to immediately work through our differences.
B. I try to find a fair combination of gains and losses for both of us.
21. A. In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
B. I always lean toward a direct discussion of the problem.
22. A. I try to find a position that is intermediate between his and mine.
B. I assert my wishes.
23. A. I am very concerned with satisfying all our wishes.
B. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
24. A. If the other's position seems very important to him I would try to meet his wishes
B. I try to get him to settle for a compromise.
25. A. I try to show him the logic and benefits of my position.
B. In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
26. A. I propose a middle ground.
B. I am nearly always concerned with satisfying all our wishes.
27. A. I sometimes avoid taking positions that would create controversy.



- B. If it makes the other person happy, I let him maintain his views.
28. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I usually seek the other's help in working out a solution.
 29. A. I propose a middle ground.
B. I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.
 30. A. I try not to hurt the other's feelings.
B. I always share the problem with the other person so that we can work it out.

The Conflict Window ... how the responses engage tasks and relationship



Understanding the 5 conflict responses looks like this related to a natural tendency towards task or relational orientation. Therefore AVOIDING is low on both scales. COMPETING is high in task and low in relationship. ACCOMODATING high in relationships, but low on task focus. COMPROMISING is right in the middle on both scales, with COLLABORATING being the preferred model that is high both in an orientation towards relationships and task completion.

Consider Matthew 18's approach in dealing with conflict in light of this model

When dealing with conflict ...

... it is useful to understand some common ways people engage in conflict & how we fit into these common patterns of conflict

* For example, if we value relationships to the extent that we will surrender almost anything to preserve them, we may well find ourselves adopting an accommodating stance in a conflict situation.

* If our goal is to achieve our ends regardless of the cost relationally – a kind of “take no prisoners” approach – we will move towards the win at all cost competing stance.

* Sometimes our strategy will change depending on the situation. For example, we may take a collaborating stance initially, but when it seems that there is a stalemate in achieving a win collaboratively, we may pull back to a compromising stance in order to salvage at least some of the goals important to us.

* Having a mental grid such as the one above can help us to frame a conflict & understand the participants in a way that moves the situation to a good and mutually beneficial resolution.

Something to think about ...

Think of a conflict situation you recently had (or you observed someone else having) and consider:

1. What was your natural response and why? (or the identified response of the other person)

2. In what response area (5 responses on conflict window) did the situation end up in?

3. If it didn't end in a collaborative approach – why not?



Consider... in times of conflict:

Discuss around your tables

1. What is your natural response and approach with your spouse?
2. What is your natural approach in working through conflict with your church leadership?
3. What is your natural response and approach in general when dealing with people in the community?

Scoring Conflict Survey Circle the letters below which you circled on the questionnaire.

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromise	Avoiding	Accommodating
1.				A	B
2.		B	A		
3.	A				B
4.			A		B
5.		A		B	
6.	B			A	
7.			B	A	
8.	A	B			
9.	B			A	
10.	A		B		
11.		A			B
12.			B	A	
13.	B		A		
14.	B	A			
15.				B	A
16.	B				A
17.	A			B	
18.			B		A
19.		A		B	
20.		A	B		
21.		B			A
22.	B		A		
23.		A		B	
24.			B		A
25.	A				B
26.		B	A		
27.				A	B
28.	A	B			
29.			A	B	
30.		B			A

Tabulating your score... Total the number of items circled in each of the respective columns.

Competing	Collaborating	Compromise	Avoiding	Accommodating
------------------	----------------------	-------------------	-----------------	----------------------

Developing a Process to Resolve Conflict

Developing a meaningful and flexible process by which you can work through a conflict situation in your church leadership position will pay major dividends in your leadership. The process is a framework for you to show both empathy and leadership in working through the situation at hand.



10 Steps to Conflict Resolution

A Step-by-Step Guide to Conflict Resolution

Conflict happens. It happens everywhere: between friends, in the church and in the community. The good news is that it doesn't have to damage friendships in the conflict is dealt with and worked through properly. Knowing how to resolve conflict, wherever it happens, creates confidence and eases stress in your ministry. Here are some areas to consider:

1. Be Prepared Personally for the Conflict Around You.

Start preparing to resolve conflict by entering into a season of prayer. God wants to be an active part in the process of reconciliation – after all, that is what the gospel message is ultimately all about!

Care enough about your own well-being, your relationships with others in church and community, to talk about what is bothering you, to talk about conflict. Don't take it home or stuff it away. Ignoring something doesn't make it go away in your life or in the lives of your people.

Also, take note of your own heart when you consider the conflict at hand. If the conflict involves you personally, check your own behavior. What are your hot buttons? Have they been pushed? How have you handled the situation so far? What is your own responsibility in the matter? Own up. Take responsibility for your part in the conflict. Do a little soul searching, a little self-examination, before working through the situation with the other party.

If you are involved in the conflict involve a spiritually mature member of your church who can help mediate the situation. As pastor, you are in a position of authority, and by bringing in a mutually respected church member, it allows the conflict situation to be worked through in a more responsible manner.

2. Don't Wait

The sooner you resolve conflict, the easier it is *to* resolve. Don't wait. Don't let the matter boil into something bigger than it is. If you aware there is a conflict situation do all you can to resolve it in due time.

If a specific behavior has caused the conflict, promptness gives you an example to refer to and keeps you from those involved a reason to build up hostility. It also gives the other person the best chance of understanding the specific behavior that needs to be addressed.

3. Find a Private, Neutral Place

Talking about conflict has almost no chance of succeeding if it's carried out in public. Nobody likes to be embarrassed in front of others or made an example of in public. Your goal is to eliminate the tension created by conflict. Privacy and discretion will help in this regard.

Neutral places are best. Try to make the space as neutral as possible by sitting so that there is no table or other obstruction between you and the other person, if possible. This removes physical barriers to open communication.

4. Be Aware of Body Language

Be aware of body language. You convey information without ever opening your mouth to speak. Know what message you are sending the other person by how you're holding your body. You want to convey peace here, not hostility or closed-mindedness.

- Maintain eye contact.
- Be conscious of your expression. Show you care.
- Use a "Please pass the salt and pepper" voice: neutral tone, moderate speed and volume, conversational.
- Avoid absolutes like "never" and "always."

5. Share Your Feelings

Nine times out of 10, the real conflict is about feelings, not facts. You can argue about facts all day, but everyone has a right to his or her own feelings. Owning your own feelings, and caring about others', is key to talking about conflict.

Remember that **anger** is a secondary emotion. It almost always arises from fear or frustration.

It's critical here to use "I" statements. Instead of saying, "You make me so angry," try something like, "I feel really frustrated when you..."

And remember to talk about **behaviors**, not personalities.

6. Identify the Problem

Give specific details, including your own observations, valid documentation, if appropriate, and information from reliable witnesses, if appropriate.

You've shared your own feelings about the situation, described the problem, and expressed interest in resolving the matter. Now simply ask the other party how he or she is feeling about it. Don't assume. Ask.

Discuss what caused the situation. Does everyone have the information they need? Does everyone have the skills they need? Does everyone understand expectations? What are the obstacles? Does everyone agree on the desired outcome?

7. Listen Actively and with Compassion

Listen actively and remember that things are not always what they seem. Be ready to be open to the other person's explanation. Sometimes, getting all the information from the right person changes the entire situation.

Be ready to respond with compassion. Be interested in how the other person sees the situation differently than you do.

8. Find a Solution Together

Ask the other party for his or her ideas for solving the problem. The person is responsible for his or her own behavior and has the ability to change it. Resolving conflict is not about changing another person. Change is up to each individual.

Know how you want the situation to be different in the future. If you have ideas the other person doesn't mention, suggest them only after the person has shared all of his or her ideas.

Discuss each idea. What's involved? Does the person need your help? Does the idea involve other people who should be consulted? Using the other person's ideas first, especially with direct reports, will increase personal commitment on his or her part. If an idea can't be used for some reason, explain why.

9. Agree on a Plan of Action

Say what you will do differently in the future and ask the other party to verbalize his or her commitment to change in the future.

With direct reports, know what [goals](#) you want to set with the employee and how and when you will measure progress. It's important that the person verbalize what will change in a specific manner. Set a follow-up date with direct reports, and explain future consequences for failure to change, if appropriate.

Unpacking “RURAL” Conflict



Conflict can and does happen in all kinds of churches. There are some things about conflict in the rural church that are unique to the rural setting. Understanding rural realities may help us to respond appropriately in pastoral ministry and leadership.

1. What is unique about rural church conflict?

In your table groups, discuss from your experience what makes rural church conflict so unique. Think about the relational dynamics of a small, family church. Think about the visible role of the church in a small rural community.

2. How does ongoing conflict affect the life and ministry of the rural church?

In light of the unique dynamics of conflict in a rural church, explore together how this uniqueness impacts and affects the life and ministry of the rural church.

Finding RESOLUTION in Rural Church CONFLICT



Navigating through the uniqueness of rural ministry conflict requires:

1. COURAGE: You have to wade into the mess of conflict.

Resolving conflict in a church takes courage. Someone has to stand up and address the situation. Sometimes it's easier just to ignore the situation, but then the conflict can linger in the church for years. Sometimes it is easier just to leave – especially if you are the pastor.

Consider: When is it appropriate for a pastor to leave rather than remain in an ongoing church conflict situation?

Discuss: At what point do you call in your denomination/outside source to offer support and intervention? How do your people respond to outside help for an internal matter?

2. COMMUNICATION... resolving conflict in a church takes communication.

Share principles or practices have you found helpful handling communication within a rural church in times of conflict.

How do you know whether enough communication is taking place during conflict?

3. PURSUING UNITY in the RURAL CHURCH - Ephesians 4: 1-16

Gary Pearson in *Unleashing the Potential of the Smaller Church* suggests some specific action steps in pursuing unity:

- Adopt a mindset that sees occasional conflict as normal and as a challenge that can be managed and, at times, even used to benefit the church in the long run.
- Manage conflict by leading the process. Provide ample time and opportunities to meet with all the concerned members and listen lovingly and carefully to their feelings and thinking.
- Commit to doing whatever it takes to be unified as a leadership team. Let times of frank, private discussion result in all leaders leading positively in the same direction.
- Commit to building strong relationships with church members. Each leader should focus on several individuals.
- Communicate with the congregation often and provide members with opportunity to ask questions and offer input.
- Regularly preach and teach about biblical unity.
- Last, but most importantly, genuinely love the flock and pray for unity.

What is your biggest ‘take a way’ through this discussion that can help take your skill in conflict resolution to the ‘next level?’



The Rural Church Pastors Network
www.ruralchurchpastorsnetwork.com