

## CONFLICT INTERVENTION STRATEGY FOR CHURCHES

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I want to begin by explaining that the process I am about to describe is one which Rev. Chuck Zink designed and implemented on the New England District of the Church of the Nazarene. I had the opportunity to teach a course on Conflict Management with Rev. Zink as part of the Master of Ministry degree program at MVNU. During and since that time I have had the opportunity to find out a great deal about this program which I am recommending be implemented on the eight districts of the Mount Vernon Educational Zone. Rev. Zink indicates that every church with whom the following program was used is today a stronger, healthier church than it was when the intervention took place.

Obviously it would be best if conflict in churches could be addressed at an early stage so that as few people as possible are hurt by it. Most often, however, we do not have that luxury. Like conflicts in marriages, the people in marriages and churches often call for help when it is too late. In many church conflicts, the church never does call for help leaving it up to denominational authorities to step in after much damage has already been done.

The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene indicates “On each district the primary responsibility for responding to a crisis rests with the District Advisory Board....” (Section 502.2). The purpose of this conflict intervention program is to implement a strategy that will hopefully keep the church from being declared “in crisis.” Rev. Zink indicates that once a church has been declared “in crisis”, it is very difficult for the pastor to remain at that church. Our goal is to keep this from happening as much as possible.

Following are the proposed steps of the intervention strategy:

1. A church conflict comes to the attention of the district superintendent. This may happen be a call from the pastor, from a church board member or by the district superintendent’s concern about unhealthy patterns he observes in the church.
2. The district superintendent and one other person (perhaps a member of the District Advisory Board, local mission director or Assistant to the District Superintendent) have an exploratory meeting with the pastor.
3. A team is then put together to conduct interviews with the pastor, the church board and any church members who wish to be heard.
  - a. If the church has 100 or fewer in church on Sunday morning, a team of two will be sufficient. This may be the District Superintendent and the local mission director or a member of the District Advisory Board.
  - b. For larger churches, a team of six will be sent to the church. With the larger teams, the District Superintendent is not involved in the interviews. He is on site to consult with team members between interviews to begin developing a fuller understanding of the situation.
  - c. Team members will work in pairs interviewing those involved.
  - d. Team members will receive training ahead of time in conducting these interviews.

- e. Team members write up a summary of their interviews and send them to the District Superintendent.
4. The team members as a group meet with the District Superintendent a day or two after the interviews.
5. The District Superintendent writes up a full report including a recommendation for helping the church manage the conflict. The report is then sent out to all team members by e-mail for their review. Team members are encouraged to suggest whatever modifications to the report they think appropriate.
6. The District Superintendent makes whatever changes to the report he thinks are appropriate and sends it to the pastor.
7. A meeting is scheduled with the pastor and later that evening the District Superintendent meets with the church board.
8. The following Sunday evening a meeting is scheduled with any members of the congregation who wish to attend.
9. The District Superintendent writes a final report indicating what actions are to be taken by the pastor and/or the church board. In extreme cases, He may advise the District Advisory Board to declare the church in crisis.