

**CONFLICT AND CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP**  
**TPM 612**  
**Spring 2011, Virginia Theological Seminary**  
**Dr. Joyce Ann Mercer**

**Monday and Friday**  
**2:00 to 3:25 pm**  
**Addison 109**

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**Course Description:** Christians, like other people, fight from time to time. Sometimes conflict offers a space for creative change. Often, however, it can be harmful and destructive. Good leadership in conflict situations is critical in the church today. This course focuses on understanding the dynamics of conflict and conflict transformation, from the standpoint of faithful public church leadership. Using texts, case studies, and other resources, we will compare various models of defining and dealing with conflict in congregations; access and work with students' differing personal styles and comfort levels in conflict situations; and consider Christian theological understandings of conflict and its transformation.

**Objectives for Learners:**

1. Demonstrate understanding of various approaches to conflict and its resolution/transformation [quizzes, case studies, exam, class participation];
2. Develop awareness of one's own responses to conflict, along with a reflective understanding of the strengths and limitations one brings to engagements with conflict [reflection paper, TKI, case studies, class participation];
3. Use knowledge of conflict processes and self-awareness analytically and practically in assessing conflict, and responding to conflict in practices of leadership appropriate to a particular community, culture, and faith tradition [role plays, paper, exam, class participation];
3. Articulate an emerging theological and biblical perspective on conflict in the church that informs your pastoral response and practice of leadership in conflict situations [class participation, final exam];
4. Practice approaches/skills for addressing conflict, identifying and demonstrating specific leadership skills in relation to conflict [case studies, final exam]. These include but are not limited to:
  - Recognition and assessment of conflict
  - Developing strategies conflict de-escalation when appropriate
  - Constructive engagement of conflict
  - Empathic and analytical listening skills

- Practical wisdom of one's own limits, and knowledge about seeking help from others
- "Practical awareness" of differences in conflict experiences based on culture, gender, faith tradition, and other forms of difference

### **Some Assumptions Guiding This Course:**

\*Conflict is inevitable among Christians and in churches because it is a feature of our humanity that we experience differences and struggle with each other. It does not follow, however, that conflict is necessarily unfaithful or against God. This course is based on the premise that conflict is not inherently negative or bad (in a moral sense), although it may become both of these in its most destructive forms.

\*This is not a course designed to turn participants into expert mediators or conflict managers. While we will learn and practice some skills of leadership amidst conflict, the process of becoming highly skilled in dealing with conflict takes years of experience, training, and work. This course may serve as a starting point.

\*Some elements of conflict are context- and culture- specific; others seem more generally "universal." It matters to notice the distinction when dealing with conflict.

\*There is nothing quite as practical as a good theory.

\*Those who read with understanding, and give evidence of this act in their assignments, are far more likely to pass the course than those who do not read.

### **Required Texts:**

Furlong, Gary T. The Conflict Resolution Toolbox : Models & Maps for Analyzing, Diagnosing, and Resolving Conflict. Mississauga, Ont.: J. Wiley & Sons Canada, 2005.

Schirch, Lisa, and David W. Camp. The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects : A Practical, Hands-on Guide. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007.

Kraybill, Ronald S. with Robert A. Evans and Alice Frazer Evans, *Peace Skills: Manual for Community Mediators* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass), 2001.

Halverstadt, Hugh F. *Managing Church Conflict* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 1991

Brubaker, David R. *Promise and Peril : Understanding and Managing Change and Conflict in Congregations*. Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2009.

Schreier, Robert J. The Ministry of Reconciliation : Spirituality & Strategies. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998.

### **Recommended &/Or Suggested Texts:**

Augsburger, David, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 1992.

Lederach, John Paul, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse PA: Good Books), 2003.

Sawyer, David. *Hope in Conflict: Discovering Wisdom in Congregational Turmoil* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press), 2007.

Becker, Penny Edgell, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999.

Leas, Speed B. *Moving Your Congregation Through Conflict*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1985. Available on reserve in library, or to purchase as an online, downloadable resource from: <http://www.alban.org/bookstore.aspx>

McKinney, Lora-Ellen. Getting to Amen : 8 Strategies for Managing Conflict in the African American Church. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2005.

Other Helpful Resources:

### **Expectations of Learners:**

1. Attend class regularly; participate in pairs and small group processes as narrator, responder, and observer. Come to class prepared, meaning that reading and written assignments have been completed prior to the start of class to facilitate engaged participation.
2. Observe seminary policies on intellectual integrity/plagiarism: students are expected to provide appropriate citation for sources, including internet sources, in written materials.
3. Recognizing the power of language to both express and shape reality, students are expected to use inclusive language in speaking and writing about persons; and to utilize a variety of forms of speech referencing the Divine.
4. Participation in role plays, discussion, and case studies; respectful and rigorous feedback among a learning community of peers.
5. If you have a documented learning disability please notify the professor as soon as possible so that appropriate planning can take place.

**LAPTOPS AND CELLPHONES:** This is a small class where face-to-face relationships are both our reality and in an important way, our subject matter--and we are meeting in a WiFi environment, where temptations to wander off into cyberspace are rife. Laptop computers and WiFi have transformed the way that we study, listen and write. But in a course like ours, laptop use can be distracting both to the instructor/students trying to make eye contact with you and to the computer-less student sitting next to you. We will be moving around the classroom in role plays, pairings, etc. and you may or may not always be near an electrical outlet. So please, for the 85 minutes that we are together, go ahead and use your laptop, but please stay off the Internet unless it is part of our class work, and remember that we are all in this discussion together. If you have a cell phone, kindly set it to its stun mode during class or turn it off.

### **Assignments:**

**1. Case Study Analysis [25%]:** In this class we will work through a number of "cases" of conflict. One of these will be the focus of short papers (5 pages) in which you will respond to questions about the case. This short paper is intended to provide you with a vehicle to integrate your readings with your practice. In it you will respond to the case (through questions provided by the instructor), drawing on texts to assist you in making sense of the conflict situation addressed in the particular case. An important teaching-learning goal in this assignment concerns the ability to demonstrate a working knowledge of a particular theoretical perspective on conflict whether or not you agree with that perspective.

**2. Personal Responses to Conflict [15%]:** This short paper (2 pages) is an opportunity for you to examine your "conflict history," and articulate what you are learning about your conflict style and the personal features you bring that affect your responses to conflict. The goal of this assignment is for you to become more reflectively self-aware of your gifts and limitations for ministry in conflict situations, utilizing tools from this course and previous courses (TKI, MBTI, others) to enhance self-knowledge.

**3. Quizzes [20%]:** there will be two opportunities for you to demonstrate your accountability to the readings of the course in three short quizzes based on specific readings as noted in the schedule of work.

**3. Final Exam [40 %]:** On the last day of class, we will work with a final case study. Following this, in a 2-hour exam period scheduled by the registrar, you will respond to questions based on this case. The exam is a closed book, in-class exam. The goal of this assignment is for you to demonstrate your knowledge and integration of material from across the breadth of the entire course in response to the conflict situation in the case.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic and Focus</b>	<b>Readings and Assignments</b>
Monday Jan. 31	Introduction to the course and each other	Take the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Instrument Online
Friday Feb. 4	Conflict: What It Is, Why It Happens? Frameworks: Management, Mediation, Arbitration, Transformation, Dialogue, Other? Stages of A Conflict Mediation Process Preparing for Conflict Work: Introductory Stage	<b>Kraybill, Evans and Evans</b> , pp. xv-42  <b>Furlong</b> , pp. 1-24
Monday Feb. 7	“Storytelling” Listening Skills for Conflict Mediation Empathic Listening Analytic Listening	<b>Furlong</b> , pp. 25-60  <b>K, E and E</b> , pp. 43-50 & 87-100
Friday Feb. 11	Listening, continued Culture and Context as conflict dynamics	<b>Augsburger TBA</b> <b>Choy</b> , “Decision Making and Con in the Congregation” (online) Recommended: <b>McKinney</b> , pp. x-
Monday Feb. 14	“Problem Solving”	<b>K, E, and E</b> , pp. 51-74 <b>Furlong</b> , pp. 61-88, 109-126
Friday Feb. 18	“Agreement”	<b>K, E, and E</b> , pp. 75-84 <b>Schreiter</b> , pp. 3-22
Monday Feb. 28	* “Levels of Conflict” approaches	<i>Quiz #1</i> (on K, E, and E Mediation model)
Friday Mar. 4	* No class: Catch up on reading!	
Monday Mar. 7	Conflict Intensity and the Practice of Assessment in Congregations	<b>Speed Leas</b> , <i>Moving Your Church Through Conflict</i>
Friday Mar. 11	Identity-based Conflict in the Church and Trauma	<b>Mercer</b> , TBA <b>Schreiter</b> , pp. 23-39, 70-82
Monday Mar. 14	Leadership from Within Congregational Conflict Situations: Understanding Personal Responses	<b>Halverstadt</b> , pp. 1-33 & 202-204 TKI review <i>Personal Conflict History 2 pg. pa</i>
Monday Mar. 28	Leadership in Conflict, continued Conflict Assessment	<b>Halverstadt</b> , pp. 34-86, 205-207
Friday April 1	Ethical and Strategic Leadership in congregational systems	<b>Halverstadt</b> , pp. 89-199
Monday April 4	Practice	<i>Quiz #2</i> (on Halverstadt, Leas, and Mercer)
Friday April 8	Conflict in Congregations: Learning from Research	<b>Brubaker</b> , pp. vii-52 Recommended: <b>Becker</b>
Monday April 11	A Revised Systems Approach to Congregational Conflict	<b>Brubaker</b> , pp. 55-126
Friday April 15	Practicing a Pastoral Presence in Emotion-Filled Conflictual Situations: A Theological Practice of Peace-building	<b>Schreiter</b> , pp. 52-69, 83-102
Monday	Comparative Models	<b>Furlong</b> , pp. 167-251

April 18		
Friday April 29	Dialogue and Conflict	<b>Schirch and Camp</b> , entire
Monday May 2	Transforming Conflict: Practice	Recommended: <b>Lederach</b>
Friday May 6	Transforming Conflict, Practice	<i>Case Study Paper Due</i>
Monday May 9	Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Conflict Work	<b>Schreier</b> , pp. 105-130
Tuesday May 10	Last Things and Loose Ends	
	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	