



# Missouri District

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

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## Conflict Management & Reconciliation

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What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ...You desire... you covet... you do not ask... you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. *James 4:1-3*

### Our COVID Conflict

**We are seeing conflicts of all kinds, personal, interpersonal, corporate, and spiritual. *Everyone is in conflict with COVID-19 to some degree, resulting in a decreased sense of well-being.* This resource seeks to aid your faith journey through the ongoing conflict related to the pandemic.**

Hear some comments highlighting the kinds of conflicts people are experiencing during our summer of 2020:

- “Why do parishioners talk to behind my back. Do they really want me?” – Pastor
- “I don’t understand people!” – Senior Church Member
- “You adults contradict yourselves all the time!” – Teenager
- “No, I’m not angry. I’m just frustrated!” – Elder
- “They don’t appreciate my dedication.” – School Faculty Member
- “Who did you vote for?” [said sarcastically] – Friend
- “The school is forcing us to do what?!” – Parent
- “Where did our school families go? Am I going to keep my job?” - Teacher
- “\_\_\_\_\_ [chirp, chirp]” – A Coach’s Response to a Player’s Question
- “As Christians, surely there is a better way to treat a worker” – A Fired Worker



# Conflict Management is Like Driving

During a conflict, we are called upon to take action even if that action is to yield. A great visual for this is driving a car. No matter where you are going, or your style of driving, a main goal of driving is to avoid crashing into other commuters. When there is an obstacle or other drivers which may lead to a crash or conflict, you cooperate and *voluntarily* take action (you turn, slow down, look around your car, etc.) This applies to communication with conflicts too. Regardless if the conflict is planned or spontaneous, changing the course of a conflict is called “adjustment”.

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## 10 Rules for Engaging in Conflict Management

### 1. Approach with genuine love & understanding:

Never pose yourself above another or profile someone else’s value or identity. (i.e. “*They are lame*”) We are valued by God in Christ. (i.e. “*They are fellow sinners saved by Christ*”).

### 2. Be genuinely interested:

in others & their goals: Acting presumptively or defensively will foster a sense of deception & distrust. Rather, build rapport by listening carefully, reflect the plans and intentions of the other party.

### 3. Avoid wrong place, wrong time:

Spontaneous conversations after worship or a church meeting set people up for failure of appropriate preparation, prayer, Scriptural reflection & consideration of multiple influences. Seek an agreed upon time to meet this will build a connection between you and the other person & discuss the subject matter.

### 4. Slow down & Take Breaks if Needed:

Patiently express understanding & empathy without interrupting each other. Using a calm voice communicates care and reduces negative interactions. Taking breaks is also important for all parties to prayerfully reflect on the meaning of what is shared. Never assume that all issues can be solved in one short meeting.

### 5. Moderate your perspective & emotions

with thoughtful preparation. Emotional distress such as fear, shame, anger, and sadness is reduced by reading and meditating on the Scriptures, especially ones that reflect God’s grace for you. This interrupts our desire to use self-preservation tactics at the expense of others, such as poised accusations that marginalize or attack others.

### 6. Always pray for the Holy Spirit

to use the Scriptures in your heart and mind during upcoming interactions. That’s the job of the Holy Spirit, so we should depend upon such a Heavenly provision.



## 7. Follow up:

Circle back to check in with mutual support through the Word, prayer, and encouragement from a brother or sister in the faith.

## 8. Remain truthful:

A switch & bate tactic is a parcel of the Deceiver. *Never* use a façade of buttering up a person prior to confronting the challenges between you and another. Express care. Holding the relationship hostage with performance expectations (e. *forgiveness upon contingency, affection if...string attached, etc*) just creates a negative hierarchy in the relationship and creates another conflict rather than solving one.

## 9. Caring reconciliation requires your involvement:

Hiding or remaining silent fails us and others.

## 10. Initiate Confession:

even before someone else gets to it as if it were a race. Admit your contribution to the conflict by not waiting for the other person to admit their misdeeds or poor attitudes.

**If you want to change people, love ‘em: People are motivated by genuinely demonstrated love in the forms of respect, honesty, grace, good-will, care, concern, connection and support. Choose healing words: Refuse to demean, dismiss, or transfer your pain to others. Choose respectful words.**

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There are some instances where rational conversation require not only exceptional patience and empathy, but may require the assistance of professionally qualified helpers.

- People managing multiple anxious provoking events/circumstances of high intensity.
- Dysfunctions of lucidity or distorted senses of reality.
- Perception difficulties due to mental and/or emotional damage. (i.e. adult and childhood trauma experiences. See “ACE’s” in references)
- Physical/mental/emotional developmental challenges/issues.
- Congregational/corporate/community-wide incidents of drastic or immediate change/trauma.
- Children fall in this category because they are “under construction”. They are not little adults in thought, feeling, knowledge base, skill, experience or faith. Their senses of reality are *being developed* and should be addressed accordingly. Helpful explanations can be found by Googling *Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development*.



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## Common Myths with Managing Conflict

### **"It is possible to go a day *without* conflict..."**

Conflict can be understood generally as two competing forces, values, opinions. Examples in daily life range widely from two people trying to occupy the same parking spot or people debating about whether pineapple belongs on pizza. If there are two different people on earth, conflict is inevitable.

### **"I'm just calling it like it is!"**

**How** we deal with conflict **determines** whether it will be a wedge-driving experience that plants the seeds of hatred that can permanently divide people or something more personally pleasant and *God-pleasing*? Thankfully, God leads the way with His grace from the moment of the first sin. In Genesis 3:15 we hear God set forth the promise that He will send one to face creation's conflict with Satan. In John 3:16 we hear how God's love for human-kind was fulfilled in Jesus' fulfillment of the promise set forth in the Garden of Eden. And, in Matthew 28:18-20 we hear how Jesus passes His heavenly authority to His disciples to confront people's condemnation with forgiveness, cleansing from guilt & shame with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So, if this question lingers "Is there a loving way through conflict without harming relationships?", the answer is a resounding "Yes".

### **"It's not personal—it's just business."**

When workers are released from employment, supervisors/HR representatives are trying to say, "I/we/this organization/church can't endure the broken expectation(s) AND for whatever reason this broken expectation/ flaw/dysfunction exists, I don't want you to perceive this as a personal affront."

Let's not get confused. An essential part of being human means having emotions. Any rejection is still a rejection, and people are going to perceive such as a devastating or traumatic experience. In other words, ***it really is personal.***

### **"If I bring it up, I'll cause people pain and lose my relationship with them."**

Harm is not necessarily the same thing as emotional distress/pain. Supportive honesty should be something that is shared mutually and regularly! Instead it might sound like this: "I care about you and want to talk about how I can support you this week." or "You are important to the Lord and to me, so I want to regularly meet to mutually support each other."



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## 4 Guiding Principles to Conflict Management

### #1

#### **Forgiveness Doesn't Equate Agreement**

You are not stating agreement with someone else by forgiving someone. God's love for us caused Jesus to be sent to reconcile the world to Himself, and the Holy Spirit was poured out on sinful people in order to bring about needed changes in humans. Grace always comes first and is never used as a lure, just genuine love from God.

### #2

#### **Relationships are Important for Change**

You are not joining or making yourself a party to someone else's misdeeds or values by maintaining a caring relationship with someone else, even if the other person believes or perceives it that way. We always pray for and set up future conversations around God's Word. Let God do the changing. You and I get to do the introducing.

### #3

#### **Visible Disagreement is Not Effective**

You are not obligated to hang your head in shame to display a sense of disappointment when someone else behaves or speaks in a manner contrary to your faith. Shame is not an effective tool and usually ruins any further opportunity to develop a discipleship supportive relationship. Such an expression of guidance, teaching, compassion, explanation of Biblical guidance is best communicated within a private caring conversation that is wrapped in a habit of gathering around God's Word.

### #4

#### **Use God's Authority**

When confronting one another, instead of saying "It's ok" or "I forgive you", bring Jesus' forgiveness with you into the conversation. Rather than standing on our own merit to say "I forgive you", as brothers and sisters in Christ, we can say "Jesus forgives me and I forgive you". Otherwise people can be left comparing their performance evaluation against yours. Our goal isn't to promote ourselves, it's to restore the relationship and manage the issues we have with one another.



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## Next Steps

Develop your conflict resolution skills. We're most certainly not stuck with the skill set we currently have for the rest of our lives. As a simple Good News next step, take a look at the virtual conference offered by Ambassadors of Reconciliation across August and September 2020. It's offered for free and the first ones are coming up in just a couple of weeks. You can take a look at the dozens of speakers and workshop titles starting now and register for any of the Gospel centered sessions. You can find it at <https://www.aorhope.org/conf2020>. It's an easy first start, but it will also give you a taste of hearing someone speaking the Good News of our Lord Jesus to you while remaining COVID safe.

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## References, Resources, and Disclosures

### Disclosures

- This paper is limited to a brief presentation of much more extensive researched subjects. This material is presented in order to encourage further discussion and resourcing of church workers and congregations of the Missouri District-LCMS.
- For further dialog or inquiry about this paper or to find other resources on this topic, contact Rev. Marty Hasz, PLPC, Assistant to the President for Church Worker and Congregational Health; <https://mo.lcms.org/>
- The author encourages further self-study & group Bible study in the context and relationship of a local LCMS congregation and/or pastor.

### References and Resources

*Built on The Rock-The Healthy Congregation*, 2017, by Ted Kober

*Announcing God's Grace*, <https://www.aorhope.org/product-page/announcing-god-s-grace-form>

*Don't Confuse Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation*, by Ted Kober <https://www.aorhope.org/articles>

*Crucial Conversations* by Joseph Grenny/Vital Smarts

*Crucial Accountability* by Joseph Grenny/Vital Smarts

*Resilient Ministry-What Pastors told us about Surviving and Thriving* by Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman & Donald C. Guthrie, 2013.

*Strategic Communication Skills-For Deep Structure Listening* Developed by L.E.A.C Consultants, Inc.

Reynoldsburg, OH (1993) By John S. Savage, <http://leadplus.com/Consultants.htm>

## Appendix A

### Biblical references about conflict:

**CONFLICT, INTERPERSONAL** The Bible illustrates, explains, and offers solutions for interpersonal conflict. Among the more notable instances of interpersonal conflict recorded in the Bible are the hostilities between Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-16), Abram and Lot (Gen. 13:8-18), Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25-27; 32-33), Jacob and Laban (Gen. 29-31), Saul and David (1 Sam. 18-31), Mary and Martha (Luke



10:38–42), Jesus’ disciples (Mark 9:33–37; Luke 22:24–27), Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36–41), and the Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 1:10–12; 3:2–4; 11:18).

The root cause of interpersonal conflict is sin (Gal. 5:19–20). James explains that fighting is the result of uncontrolled passions and desires (James 4:1–3). The book of Proverbs characterizes those who stir up conflict as persons given to anger (Prov. 15:18; 29:22), greed (Prov. 28:25), hate (Prov. 10:12), gossip (Prov. 16:28), and worthless perversions (Prov. 6:12–15). Such conflicts inevitably result in personal destruction (Prov. 6:15), discord (Prov. 6:14), and strife (Prov. 10:12; 16:28). It is no wonder that “the Lord hates ... who stirs up trouble among brothers” (Prov. 6:16, 19 HCSB).

The Bible places great value on the ability to live at peace with one another (Ps. 34:14; Mark 9:50; Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:13; Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 3:11), in unity (Ps. 133:1), and harmony (Rom. 15:5–6). At the same time, the Bible declares unequivocally that such peace is given only by God (Num. 6:26; John 14:27; 16:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; 2 Thess. 3:16) and lived out only as believers pattern their lifestyles after that of Jesus (Phil. 2:3–8).<sup>[1]</sup>

Quote from *Don’t Confuse Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation*, by Ted Kober of Ambassadors of Reconciliation:

Conflict resolution focuses on resolving the *material* or *substantive* issues in a dispute, while *reconciliation* seeks to restore relationships by addressing the *personal* or *relational* issues. If there are no relational issues to reconcile, conflict resolution may be adequate. Likewise, if the conflict centers solely on personal issues, reconciliation may be sufficient. However, the vast majority of disputes involves both kinds of issues. If parties attempt to deal with one and not the other, they will find the final solution incomplete and unsatisfactory.

<sup>[1]</sup> Chad Brand et al., eds., “Conflict, Interpersonal.” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 330.

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