

Passages: Tools for Finding Your Way Through Conflicts

By Dr. Tamara Albrecht

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Part IV: Ministry Issues

A. The following ministry issues often occur, regardless of the denomination:

- Lack of knowledge and training in dealing with stressful church situations
- Lack of clarity regarding job boundaries
- Undervaluing skills and knowledge of music ministers
- Failure to consult with music ministers when implementing major worship changes
- Difficulty in finding and funding help and guidance for conflict situations
- Ungodly treatment of music ministers which leads to being fired or resignation
- Conflicting views of what styles and music should be used for worship

Uncertain people tend to become persecutors. Persecutors in the church may and do sometimes wear false collars. They struggle with internal battles. Craddock adds that those battles point to “the struggle from head to heart. I know that the longest trip we ever make is the trip from head to heart...And until that trip is complete we are in great pain. We might even lash out at others.” [Fred B. Craddock, *The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 244] Church leaders who go through such inner struggles tend to replace their shields with arrows to seek revenge. Christian servant leaders, however, who polish their armor with conflict resolution skills are led by the Holy Spirit to disarm the arrows of revenge.

B. Job termination: In Ephesians 6:17, Paul tells us to “Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” These can be consequences of failed conflict resolution—

- Called in and terminated without discussion or reason—how do you react?
- Terminated because of prejudice or discrimination

- Told to resign and threatened that if one does not resign quietly there will be no severance pay
- Terminated and slandered
- Terminated by scapegoating—blamed for “lack of church growth,” “failure to grow the music program” etc.
- Terminated as a result of a power struggle within the staff or church leadership
- Terminated and called “arrogant and aloof,” justly or unjustly

Mark Nation tells us besides armor and prayer, if people in conflict listen to each other, new information and insights may arise from mutual dialogue. The process of taking time to talk and listen utilizes inter- and intra-personal skills. In turn, these skills nurture the process of resolution to achieve, as Nation shares, hope, trust, freedom from guilt, forgiveness, and respect. [Mark Thiessen Nation, “Toward a Theology for Conflict Transformation: Learnings from John Howard Yoder,” Goshen College, 54, accessed April 30, 2012, <http://www.goshen.edu/mqr/pastissues/jan06nation.html>]

Returning to the whole reason for training church musicians in conflict resolution skills for working in the church, we must ask the question how do we implement the tools, the peace, and the armor when the church itself fails to recognize the huge conflict it creates among people who serve in leadership or volunteer capacities? Nation affirms that the church is afraid to do Jesus’ work. Church leaders avoid dealing with violence by not teaching how to confront wrong-doing, ignoring and not recognizing and not fighting evil, not modeling contemplative rituals, not teaching ways to deal with healthy conflict and reaching resolutions, and not striving to become a “community of peace.” [Nation, 54] If churches wish to be peacemakers, worship has to be, in the words of MacArthur, “the communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society and of history.” [John MacArthur, *Ephesians*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986, quoted by Nation at 54] The role of Church communities should demonstrate that conflict resolution is both a social science and a set of skills that are vital for churches and communities to learn how to become peacemakers. “The bottom line,” states MacArthur, “is this: at its core, peacemaking is not a set of skills, of course, but a way of life...Peacemaking is a virtue among Christians.” [Ibid. 52-53]

Paul uses conflict resolution skills to ward off evil through active use and constant awareness of seven pieces of godly armor engraved in our being. In summary (vv. 18-20) he commands us to “Pray in the Spirit...Stay alert...Be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere...Pray for me...Ask God to give me the right words...Pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should...” If we use the entire Ephesians passage as preventative conflict resolution tools both personally and corporately, we encourage each other to stay alert and seek godly ways to engage and support musicians and ordained ministers to spread the gospel as team ambassadors. Since music ministry spreads the gospel through music it is important to prayerfully choose high quality music and texts so that sermons and musical offerings support and together strengthen the proclamation of the Gospel at the highest level.

In conclusion, it has been my conviction that healthier partnerships between musicians and ministers might evolve if music ministry were decreed as a biblically ordained professional worship ministry equal in status to ordained clergy. Thus if church musicians were respected as ministers (even if un-ordained), future conflicts might be easier to negotiate and resolve. As a result conflict resolution skills for musicians would also help establish ministry-status because conflict resolution training fulfills one of the skills some ordained clergy have been required to study in seminary.