

Passages: Tools for Finding Your Way Through Conflicts

By Dr. Tamara Albrecht

Tamara Makdad Albrecht, late member of the Committee for Career Development and Support, held a Doctorate of Worship Studies and was an organist and choirmaster, lecturer at Emory University, seminar leader and performing musician. She presented a workshop at the 2014 AGO convention in Boston on scriptural approaches to conflict resolution in clergy-musician relations; here is part one of a 4-part series based on her notes from that session. (Published with permission of Dr. Timothy Albrecht, and edited by David Rhody, Director of the Committee on Career Development and Support.)

Part I: Focus on Yourself

When seeking a new position, keep these points in mind: Know yourself. Know what you want. Know the working conditions. Know the job expectations. Are you the right fit for the job? Is the job the right fit for you? The interview is the most crucial piece of the puzzle.

One way to achieve a new conflict resolution life-style as a Christian church musician is the ability to utilize biblical examples to arm one's self against those who would inflict harm. Ephesians 6:10-20 is a powerful visual presentation of the principles of living in harmony with each other by donning Christ's armor. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, Spirit and prayer are seven pieces of armor that represent tools for avoiding conflict.

- A. Before committing to a position: Are your needs and expectations clearly defined in a job description or contract?

Is mediation agreed to if requested? What is the plan for performance assessment and termination? Follow a code of honesty: bring all your concerns to the interview and expect honest discussion. Do you sense hidden agendas? Does the church follow Christian standards and use scripture as a guide? Do you sense respect for the music ministry? Respect for the musician as a minister in his/her own right? Is there provision for an advocate to help handle prejudice, scapegoating and mistreatment if you should feel targeted because of ethnicity, lifestyle orientation, age, gender? Are you prepared to walk away if something arises which might threaten your job stability?

- B. What are the Church's needs?

What does the church need to know about you (within proper legal boundaries)? What work ethic is expected in the music minister? What faith life do they seem to expect (although that is private information)? What kind of working relationship does the church wish from the music minister?

- C. Before committing to accept God's armor, we must first strip off our own armor. Carla Waterman is very clear in her explanation of the dangers of wearing the wrong armor:

Self-protective armor can be forged by our anger whether the links are hot, bitter and defensive or cold, icy and withdrawn. Rather than fleeing to the cross of Christ with our pain, we nurse it, and, in failing to fight the battle of releasing the offending party to Jesus and living hidden within the spaciousness of Christ's righteousness, we build up our own defenses. Sometimes we attack our offender; sometimes we simply choose not to care anymore. Either choice encases us in rigid self-protection that hardens our hearts. [Carla A. Waterman and Pamela K. Kreske, *Songs of Assent* – Carol Stream IL: WaterManuscripts, 2009, 147]

Try writing a personal mission statement. By doing this the musician clarifies his/her own commitment level and understanding of servant leadership. The musician establishes and validates music ministry as hierarchically equal to the status of ordained ministry as opposed to lay ministry.

Trust yourself and your instincts. In verse 16, the Apostle Paul states, "In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of evil." Ephesians 6:10-11, "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil." Thus, the importance of armor and prayer as conflict resolution practices is an essential Christian lifestyle tool.

Stay awake when your instincts warn you of some ways others might try to control you with mental abuse or inappropriate behavior. Be alert for ego trips, body language signals, triangulation (involving a third party in a power struggle), engaging in gossip and scapegoating.

There is much irony in talking about the shield of faith and at the same time serving God in the church where so many Christians are dodging fiery arrows hurled by church leaders and congregations, and alike by ordained and music ministers. Often it seems arrow throwers are hungry for power. Evil actions are usually triggered by competitive behavior, jealousy and perceived feelings of being threatened personally and professionally. Interestingly, the root of such behavior usually stems from feelings of inadequacy. Cohick reminds us:

Perhaps our desire for success...has blinded us to the real goal of Christian life--obedience. Our obedience matters not only in the world of human interactions but also in the spiritual realm, for it brings glory to God. It shows the spiritual forces of evil and darkness that God reigns supreme and that he has the power to do the impossible, namely provide grace for humans to live righteously. Obedience, however, is not simply a matter of the will, for if we think in those terms, then we are on our way to assuming right living is our own doing. We need to be meditating and reflecting at the foot of the cross, the place where sins are forgiven, where we have been saved to do good works in God's grace. [Lynn Cohick, *Ephesians: A New Covenant Commentary*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010, 160.]

Next month: Focus on the Job.