

## **Passages: Tools for Finding Your Way Through Conflicts**

**By Dr. Tamara Albrecht**

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### **Part III: Ways to Work in the Spirit**

The conflicts we face tend to be spiritual indeed. In Ephesians 6:18, Paul states “Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.”

- A. Before any meeting with committees or members of the congregation, meet with the ministry team to get a perspective on how much the team understands the implications of change in areas affecting the music ministry.
  - A meeting might result in leading a respectful, knowledgeable, and honest but positive discussion that is educational and helpful for all sides.
  - If the discussion heats up, “reset” with prayer or a minute of silent reflection or a short and pertinent scripture reading before continuing.
  - A mediator might be helpful if both sides are not willing to keep the discussion God-centered instead of self-centered.
  
- B. Before meeting with the ministry team or committees involved in music ministry decisions, familiarize yourself with both PROS and CONS of potential conflictive subjects, with the idea of anticipating if or how compromise might work. Some examples are:
  - Pipe organ vs. electronic
  - Keyboard vs. acoustical piano
  - Other acoustic/electronic instruments
  - Praise band vs. worship that encompasses a vast history of great music genres
  - Language issues: labels for styles, understanding music terminology, major and minor keys – why is minor perceived as “bad?”
  - Secular vs. sacred music

- Hymnals vs. screens
- Hymn/song texts only vs. texts with music
- Use of technology during worship to display artwork, videos, texts, announcements, quotes
- Discussion on what is worship and why certain words, phrases or concepts might not be loyal to God's expectation of our role as Christian models and shepherd leaders
- Casual worship and attire
- Loose or last-minute worship planning
- All services must be happy and upbeat
- Do not change anything
- Stay only with what is safe—if an idea does not work the first time, out it goes
- Music *enhances* worship and other phrases that do not include music ministry and music as worship in its own right
- Why wear robes?
- Why children's role in worship is seen as performance followed by applause.

C. Work toward the following outcomes—

- The church musician is directly consulted on all matters pertaining to voluntaries, choral and instrumental music, hymns, liturgy, acoustics, instruments, music spaces, special services, and conflicts dealing with music ministry or team ministry
- Working as a ministry team, both on the same ministerial level, with mutual respect for one another, helps diminish conflict issues between ordained ministry and music ministry
- Through learning to be more observant of impending conflict, the musician is able to:
  1. Recognize early signs of conflict (e.g. changes in staff relationships)
  2. Observe physical changes: mailboxes are re-arranged, offices are moved, staff listings in bulletin are re-arranged, rehearsal space is downgraded
  3. Be more confident of self, and trust one's reactions and signals when conflict is present
- The musician enjoys honest interaction with staff and ministers

- The musician is able to build a strong and effective congregational support group
- The musician understands the importance of respecting clergy and staff, even if there is not complete harmony and agreement
- The musician engages in frequent dialogue with the chain of command
- The musician utilizes effective conflict resolution strategies for conflict situations
- The musician is conscious of the church infrastructure and the location of support systems outside the work place
- The musician is confident, effective, knowledgeable, rational, and objective in times of conflict or job stress or termination
- The musician uses expertise to defend and support the best solutions rather than the most expedient, popular or cheapest solutions
- The musician is able to verbalize and discuss all aspects of an issue in a non-confrontational manner
- The musician is able to successfully define and articulate the underlying issues implicit in stated issues. Two examples of the difference between stated issues and underlying issues might be—
  1. Church growth: change the music to promote growth (i.e. the minister does not like or understand high quality church music, even if blended with other high quality music genres; or the minister uses the music ministry as a scapegoat for a lack of growth)
  2. Music genres: “give the people what they want” (or what the minister wants)

It is good to approach conflict with the expectation that peace and harmony can prevail and will serve the greater good of God’s community. Steagald adds more ideas for how to walk a peaceful life journey:

How do we live in peace with God and one another? We come to the Table. We come to the altar. We pray for one another and not just about one another. We make many confessions and repent. We offer forgiveness. We do not think of ourselves more highly than we ought, and we do not think of others less. We remind ourselves, again and again, that we are all at the Table by Christ’s invitation alone: we receive this grace only by his grace. I can look to no one’s heart save my own; I can examine no one’s life but mine; I can repent for no one else’s sin. I am late to this awareness, but the wisdom is ancient. [Tom Steagald, *Praying for Dear Life: a Reason to Rise, Strength for the Day, Courage to face the Night* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 74]