



*Redeeming*  
CHURCH  
CONFLICTS

*Turning Crisis into  
Compassion and Care*

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*Foreword by Ken Sande*

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NOTE: This book is designed to provide general information on theology, biblical peacemaking, and various aspects of biblical change. It is not intended to provide pastoral, legal, or other professional advice. Readers are encouraged to seek the counsel and oversight of their local church leaders as well as competent professionals relevant to their life situations.

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## CONCLUSION: The End of Church Conflict is Never the End (Acts 15:36-41)

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Romans 12:18

“This life, therefore, is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished but it is going on. This is not the end but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory but all is being purified.” Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>

As we near the end of the narrative of Acts chapter 15 we find Paul and Barnabas working together in Antioch. Verse 35 says, But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord. Paul and Barnabas have returned from Jerusalem to the city where the conflict had erupted. They have delivered the letter from the apostles and elders. That conflict is over! Paul and Barnabas had been faithful partners as peacemakers. The truth of the Gospel was preserved, error refuted, and the work of building the church resumed. The end of conflict is wonderful and beautiful.

But the end of one conflict does not mean the end of all conflict. Conflicts can erupt at any time. Immediately, in verses 36 through 41 we read of Paul and Barnabas falling into conflict that is so sharp they part company:

*Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord .... Barnabas wanted to take Mark ... but Paul did not think it wise ... They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.* Excerpts from Acts 15:36-41

How can this be? Here we have two mature believers committed to the truth of God’s eternal Word, leaders in the church and those preaching and teaching others what it means to be holy. Not only that, they have been peacemakers, bringing to an end a divisive conflict of major proportion. Didn’t that experience teach them something about how to resolve disputes?

Here is the hard truth about conflict: as long as we remain alive the effects of sin remaining within us and the sin in the world will conspire to lead us into new conflicts. Theologians use the term state of grace to describe the condition we find ourselves in after our justification but before our glorification. Sometimes this state is described as *the already but not yet*.

This sharp disagreement and parting of company by Paul and Barnabas reflects the tension of living in the already but not yet. Even if the substance of their conflict could fall into the category of opinion and/or preference and not be, *per se*, necessarily sin, the response to their difference of opinion could and should rightly be called sin because fellowship was broken and the fruit of anger was manifested.

In the church today we will face many similar situations. We will redeem one conflict just to see another arise. Of course, we should learn from our experiences and become seasoned veterans of conflict, knowing when and how to best apply the lessons learned from those previous engagements (opportunities). As commentator Matthew Henry notes concerning this personal conflict:

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<sup>69</sup> Martin Luther, *Defense of All the Articles*, Lazareth transl., as found in Grace Brame, *Receptive Prayer* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1985) p.119.

*We must own it was their infirmity, and is recorded for our admonition; not that we must make use of it to excuse our own intemperate heats and passions, or to rebate the edge of our sorrow and shame for them; we must not say: What if I was in a passion, were not Paul and Barnabas so? ' No; but it must check our censures of others, and moderate them.<sup>2</sup>*

Conflict is inevitable, just as the great conflict between Paul and Barnabas. No Christian can escape it and that is why we need to redeem conflict, not flee or ignore it. We include verses 36-41 primarily because it is in the text, and to ignore verses just because they include hard teachings or disappointing historical information is never a good principle of biblical interpretation. But we also do so to encourage you when future conflicts come to your church. *The end of church conflict is never the end of church conflict.* However, we remember, too, that our conflicts are never without hope. Paul and Barnabas eventually redeemed their conflict when Paul forgave Mark his immaturity by later praising him (see Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24). There is always hope!

When the next conflict comes to your church what will you do? There is only one response worthy of the title you bear as Christian: *redeem conflict for God's glory and for your sanctification and the sanctification of those you call your brothers and sisters in Christ.* Paul and Barnabas both continued in ministry just as the church must do even when it faces conflict. The life of the church is as dynamic as the life of every person in it. Since we know change is the norm for each of us as we move through this life, so too is change the norm for every church. And with change comes conflict. The call to redeem our church conflicts will continue until the day the Lord returns and makes us perfect.

Even if your current disaster is averted or resolved, and even if there are beautiful testimonies of lavish forgiveness, creative solutions to material problems, and reconciled relationships, some people are still going to leave the church for reasons related to conflict. In the coming years, your members will struggle with sin and unbelief. Even with faithful discipleship and loving, gentle discipline, some members will be unrepentant, at least for a season. Sometimes, even reconciled and loving Christians will need to part company graciously over debatable issues. Still, God calls us to faithfully redeem all of our church conflicts over and over again. This requires an eternal perspective that enables you to persevere through suffering, never returning evil for evil, blessing and never cursing (Romans 12), and trusting that God is sovereignly working all things together for your good and for his glory.

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:28-31*

### **Don't Try to Retain the Illusion of a Conflict-Free Church**

Many churches try to avoid dealing with their conflicts in order to retain the status quo or the illusion that things are as they should be. For example:

- A large church of over 3000 members is going through a very difficult time. Several hundred members have fled. The pastor continues his long-planned and well-prepared sermon series unfazed, never using God's Word to address the conflict in order to provide guidance, bring comfort, add clarification, or discipline in the midst of the body's continuing meltdown. He acts as if his preaching schedule is inviolate. Rather than seeing God's present agenda for the church, he plows ahead on his schedule.

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, Volume 6), 200.

- Plans for an extravagant (and expensive) celebration service dominate church life as a new facility nears completion. These plans continue despite the fact that terrible conflict has split the congregation, litigation has been initiated, and financial support for the building fund has plummeted.

- Conflict has driven the senior pastor from the church. Within three weeks of his departure, the associate pastor is called to the position as the new senior pastor by a congregational vote in spite of denominational policy prohibiting such an action. Lay leaders and church members ignore mounting evidence of the associate's contribution to the conflict and the former pastor's departure.

- A church board conflict with the church's separate and independent school board has led to several of the most affluent and well-known church families leaving the church in protest. As supporters of the school, these disgruntled members see no responsibility to the church or even consider the relevance of the promises made by taking church membership vows. In an attempt to isolate the conflict as a mere school issue, church leaders make little effort to confront and rescue these families. Membership vows are ignored and rendered meaningless.

Why are church conflicts like these ignored or actively denied when it is clear that the church's status quo is no longer the norm, let alone a realistic possibility? Dr. Timothy Laniak of Gordon-Conwell Seminary reflects on the nature of wilderness experience this way:

*Wilderness stories in the Pentateuch characterize God as the Guiding Shepherd. Israel's Divine Pastor led his people through the wilderness by pillars of cloud and fire. He made a pathway through the Red Sea, and eventually led his people safely to their haven of rest (Ps. 77:19-20). Numbers appears to be a book about aimless wandering, but the summary in chapter thirty-three reveals God leading with a purpose. **Detours were a result of the communities' unwillingness to follow God's direction and timing** (Numbers 13-14) (emphasis added).<sup>3</sup>*

The detours that churches make into conflict frequently are the result of the communities' unwillingness to follow God's direction and timing—to follow his agenda for that time and place. But when church leaders deny their call to be his agents to re-direct the church's path out of the detour, the cosmic rebellion is compounded.

If your church is embroiled in conflict, then it should be embraced as God's new agenda for your church. Do not ignore it. Do not try to maintain a façade of a conflict-free church. Instead, embrace your conflict as an opportunity for individual and corporate spiritual growth. The preaching schedule, a celebration, the anxiety of a temporarily unfilled pulpit, or the ease of excused pastoral oversight, as the above actual cases illustrate, are expendable fluff when compared to God's present agenda. Don't give in to fear of man idolatry. Don't be lazy. Turn away from your personal agendas and consider carefully what God is doing in the life of your church:

- What does God want us to learn as we biblically respond to this situation?

- How can we ask the right questions about this conflict that will open opportunities for our people to stay engaged and not merely flee?

- From God's perspective, what are the things we should be doing next to resolve this situation? Now? Next week? Next month?

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<sup>71</sup> Laniak, Timothy S., *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks: Forty Daily Reflections on Biblical Leadership* (ShepherdLeader Publications, 2007), 190.

- How do we demonstrate loving well in this conflict?

- Who else should be helping us as we strive to be on agenda with God? Who will hold us accountable so we don't miss the lessons of this detour?

By embracing a conflict and recasting it as God's agenda for growth, church conflicts are usually shorter, less intense, and bear fruit of positive spiritual growth.

### **A Mini-Case Study**

The conflicts at Cornerstone Bible Church (CBC) began to escalate when the leaders quickly elevated the youth pastor to the position of senior pastor after their former senior pastor had resigned amid great turmoil. The younger man was popular within the congregation. He had done a good job with the youth and this was respected by both parents and older members of the church. But his transition had not gone well. His preaching was uninspired and his leadership of the elder board confusing at best. But now the elders who had made the decision and urged congregational affirmation were finding themselves increasingly on the defensive as they attempted to justify their prior action. It seemed simply too difficult to admit error. It seemed too un-Christian to confront the failing pastor with his weakness. And the conflicts grew.

By the time we were engaged as consultants, several specific and visceral personal conflicts had ignited. Some were aimed at the pastor, some at individual elders. Things were getting ugly. It became quite evident to us that the pastor was ill-equipped to lead the church in times of peace let alone this time of conflict. After many hours of investigation and interviewing, we gently confronted the pastor with the reality of the fact that he was not, at present, qualified for the position he held. He reluctantly, and fearfully, agreed.

Now came the hard part. How does he explain this to the elders who had still supported him? How does he go to the entire church to tell them they need a shepherd who can lead them as he had failed to do? And, perhaps most painfully, how does he tell his wife and two children that he needs to step down, to surrender his job and its financial security, and to seek an appropriate call elsewhere?

Of course, some would be glad to see him go. They needed the attention of God's spirit to make this not about personality and a mere shallow victory. There were those on the other side who would feel humiliated that their efforts to save the pastor would be used against them as they were shown to be wrong by the pastor's own admission of failure. Conflict and confusion ruled. Until...

At a late and long meeting with the elders, the Peacemaker Team confronted them with their responsibility to accept the burden of being peacemakers, not just peacekeepers. What were they to do? First, they had to look deep into the Scriptures and deep into their own hearts to realize that God wasn't working for their temporal happiness and joy. God was up to something more eternal—their holiness and his glory. This also meant that they were called to be faithfully obedient to his Word, regardless of the results that came to pass. The cost was potentially very high, both to the church and to each of them personally. But thankfully, they listened to God, trusted his Word, and faithfully obeyed all that he required of them.

The following Sunday the leaders stood together before the congregation. The young pastor stood with them. The most widely respected of the elders spoke first. He said he felt respected by everyone but that was because he catered to everyone as a people-pleaser, changing as conditions dictated, tickling ears for the sake of man's praise. He confessed to being two-faced and unworthy of the title elder, and he asked for forgiveness. Other elders spoke, each confessing how their own fear of man had drawn them to make

easy decisions, to take the easy road as they led the church, the popular path that now stood them in the dark forest of conflict. They each asked for forgiveness.

Then the young pastor spoke. He admitted he took the senior pastor position out of pride and out of covetousness for the larger salary and the place of prominence in the pulpit. He wept. He acknowledged his sin. And he announced his resignation. There were some howls of protest. But most there that day realized something profound was happening and that it just wasn't about these men standing before them. Some later said they saw idols being slain and shepherds emerging from the ashes. Others admitted feeling small in the presence of men who had laid down their weapons of defensiveness and self-justification in order to pick up the gentle harmony of humility as they demonstrated a unity with the crucified Christ without concern for temporal consequences. This was a day to be long remembered at CBC.

Several years have passed. I (Dave) have had contact with elders and members of that church from time to time. I've heard stories of those who left CBC to plant seeds of conflict in other neighboring churches. And I've heard stories of humility, people catching themselves as they were about to defend the desire (idol) of their heart and remembering that day that God put an end to all of that at CBC. But most of all I remember that young pastor who had decided that faking it in the church doesn't work. After some additional training he joined a parachurch ministry dedicated to serving pastors who had been displaced by church conflicts. His testimony is that if we really listen we can still hear because God's process is still at work.

Is there hope to redeem church conflicts? Yes. Yes. A thousand times, yes! One day we may sit with God and all of his saints listening to the stories. In the interim, we are comforted in knowing that Jesus understands our suffering. He knows what it's like to be betrayed, attacked, and abandoned by his closest friends—by *Christians*. Jesus is with us in our church conflicts. He is sovereign over our church conflicts. We can pick up the cross of our conflicts and suffer well—God will give us the grace we need. *God gives us Himself.*

*Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* Hebrews 4:16

## APPENDIX A

### **A. Summary of the Acts 15 Model for Redeeming Church Conflicts: A Checklist for Christians and Their Churches**

#### **Perspective**

In a church conflict, we can know for certain we have lost perspective if we begin to take matters as personal offenses. Conversely, if we see so-called opponents with eyes of compassion, we can know God is working in us to redeem this conflict for his glory and our growth.

- Maintain an eternal perspective (Acts 15:3-4), that is, set all conflict matters in the broader context of eternity so they remain appropriately viewed as temporary opportunities for spiritual growth.
- Remember the Gospel is at the core of the redemption of church conflict, and seek to glorify God in all you do (Acts 15:11).

#### **Discernment**

In a church conflict, we can know we are on the path of healing discernment if we find ourselves spending more time listening than speaking. Further, as we carefully form and ask questions seeking group health rather than merely advancing a personal favored solution, evidence emerges that God's work of redemption is advancing not only his interests but also our holiness.

- Don't contemplate final resolutions (quick answers to presenting questions) before a careful process of comprehensive problem identification has been completed and you have discerned the heart motivations and interests underlying various positions and issues (Acts 15:6-12).
- Identify every individual and group who must be considered in the conflict resolution process, remembering especially not to forget God and his interests (Acts 15:12-21).
- Carefully identify apparent competing underlying interests (motives) among and between individuals and groups (Acts 15:5, 8-11, 20).

#### **Leadership**

In a church conflict, if we embrace our personal and individual responsibility for leadership (and followership) within each of our own personal spheres of influence, we gradually become group problem solvers and increasingly turn away from mere narrow personal agendas. The more we see ourselves as shepherd-leaders (and faithful followers) serving others among God's flock, the greater the opportunity for creating an environment from which peace will flow.

- Being compelled solely by the love of Christ, remember your affirmative duty as a Christian to all other people involved, using biblical truth as your standard (Acts 15:8-11, 19-21).
- Demonstrate consistent servant leadership and faithful biblical followership (Acts 15:7-11, 13-21, 31), remembering that it is for Christ you suffer and serve.

#### **Biblical Response**

One of the biggest mistakes people make in church conflict is failing to trust Scripture. In a church conflict, as we remember that Christ loves his church more than we ever will and that he has paid more for it than we ever will, our confidence in the Bible and our commitment to faithfully pursuing biblical responses to conflict will be clear and steadfast.

- Humbly confess your own contributions to the conflict (Acts 15:10, 19).
- Hold people and groups accountable for all sinful words and behaviors (Acts 15:24) by practicing redemptive, corrective church discipline.
- Lavishly forgive one another (relational conflicts) and apply biblical principles to discover God-glorifying solutions (substantive conflicts) (Acts 15:13-20).
- Reality-test potential solutions by asking will this answer to this specific conflict lead to final resolution or generate more conflict? (Acts 15:19, 28).
- Implement decisions as wisdom dictates, remembering that true resolution will require clarity and finality (Acts 15:22-35).

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Selecting an Outside Third-Party Church Conflict Consultant**

The decision to call in an outside consultant to assist the church work through its conflicts is one that should not be taken lightly. Until 75% or more of the official church leaders *and* 60% or more of church members can say they are no longer content with the state of the church (or state of the conflicts), calling in an outside consultant prematurely may create a new set of conflicts. That being said, waiting too long to call for outside assistance can also be an error, one made by many churches. The timing of the decision to call for outside help is critical and the right time is as soon as possible after the majority recognizes that something needs to be done.

Church leaders usually are the ones initiating the process to call on the services of a professional, impartial consultant. Leaders should be unified to the greatest extent possible when this decision is made. However, in a conflict situation it is quite unlikely that unanimity will be reached. Differing factions among conflicted leaders should be appealed to on the basis of broad, transparent, and transcendent interests, such as, Do you believe that the divisions in our church grieve the Lord to the extent that he would urge us to get help? Or, What God-glorifying criteria do you believe would be needed before you could agree to employ a neutral third-party professional?

#### **SCOPE OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

The professional being considered should provide a written proposal that includes, at a minimum, the following six components:

1. Background Research
2. Education / Teaching
3. Investigation
4. Conflict Coaching / Mediation
5. Reporting
6. Training and Equipping Re: Future Conflicts

#### **1. Background Research Component**

The consultant being considered should first ask the church for extensive background records: the past ten years of membership / attendance and financial giving and spending records; all minutes of board meetings relevant to the conflict(s) and how those conflicts developed; any letters from members and regular attendees related to the conflict(s); the church's constitution, articles of incorporation, bylaws, and all policy manuals and governing handbooks (e.g., employee's handbook, new member's training manual, etc.); and any denominational Book of Church Order or Book of Discipline or other official publication of the church. A worthy professional will want to do as much background research as possible before arriving on-scene based on these types of records.

Just as the consultant must do pre-site-visit work, so must the church leadership team. All official leaders (pastoral staff, elders, deacons, etc.) and other key individuals in leadership roles (small group leaders, Sunday school teachers, staff support personnel, etc.) must be committed to the biblical study of conflict resolution. A worthy professional consultant will require this aspect of a timely program of self-study before the site visit.

## **2. Education / Teaching**

The consultant's proposal should include at least two separate educational / teaching elements, one for leaders and one for all members and regular attendees. Leader training should include the role and responsibilities of shepherd leaders, polity dynamics, group dynamics, the theology and practice of biblical church discipline, and the uniqueness of the church as a God-initiated yet human organization. Member training should address the theology of biblical peacemaking; how Christians are to resolve conflicts and be reconciled; the importance of membership vows; the importance of meaningful accountability in the church for the sake of individual and corporate holiness; and the call to follow biblically qualified and character-worthy leaders. Leaders should be required to attend teaching provided to members / attendees.

## **3. Investigation**

The consultant should be able to completely explain what data-gathering will be done through personal interviews with leaders, church members / regular attendees, and, as is appropriate, former staff, members, and regular attendees who left because of the conflict. The consultant should specify how that data will be used, and copies of all data-gathering forms should be provided in advance to church leaders so they will be able to carefully evaluate whether the questions asked are appropriate to the situation. A proposed schedule for conducting personal interviews should be provided along with a description of the scope of the interviews and how mere gossip will be controlled and discouraged.

## **4. Conflict Coaching / Mediation**

Group mediations are very difficult to effectively conduct, and the potential consultant should be able to explain how the dynamics of stage performance, fear of man, mob mentality, and control idolatry will be confronted and managed. Individual mediations usually result in either reconciliation between those at the forefront of conflicts or make it clear where irreconcilable interests exist. The consultant should be able to explain how either result will be used in the overall church conciliation process and when those results are best revealed to the congregation.

## **5. Reporting**

Two types of reports should be discussed: verbal and written. Verbal reports to both leaders and members are important because they begin to satisfy expectations for feedback in a setting that will allow discussion and questions. This is also an important additional data-gathering opportunity for the consultant. These report times must be controlled by the consultant, however, in order to prevent further divisive words and actions. A final written report to leaders covering every aspect of the conciliation process, findings concerning the causes of the conflict(s), short- and long-term recommendations, and follow-up actions should be included. The purpose and recommended use of the written report should be explained.

## **6. Training and Equipping Re: Future Conflicts**

The proposal from the potential consultant should describe how leaders and select members will be trained and equipped to deal with future church conflicts. The church will be making a significant time and financial investment in the consultant and the process he or she will lead. As such, everything that can be learned during that process from the consultant should be captured so that future conflicts may be resolved using internal church resources.

## **PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS**

In addition to understanding the scope of professional services offered by a peacemaking consultant, you should carefully examine their personal qualifications. Usually, a team approach will be proposed and the qualifications of each potential team member should be examined. These elements include:

1. Theological education and experience in the church

2. Counseling training and experience
3. Mediation training and experience
4. Church conflict intervention experience
5. Leadership abilities

### **1. Theological Education and Experience in the Church**

The consultant leading the team should have theological education and significant experience with a wide variety of church governance structures and church traditions. Depending on the nature of the conflict(s), legal training and experience may be an important consideration in order to guard against actions that could result in litigation against the church. If the proposed team leader does not have legal expertise another team member with such training and experience should be considered. Depending on the nature of the conflict(s), it may also be important that the leader or a team member be a qualified counselor with training and experience to respond to the various counseling needs of leaders and members.

### **2. Counseling Training and Experience**

Frequently, personal issues of marriage, family, employment, loss of various sorts, etc., must be addressed as elements contributing to the church's conflicts. The need for crisis counseling (addressing threats of suicide, violence, etc.) is often required and the consultant's ability (education, experience, maturity, and confidence) to handle such situations should be considered. While the lead consultant and every team member may not be a qualified biblical counselor, every team member should have basic skills to recognize crisis situations, take appropriate intervention steps, and quickly engage other qualified people. The church has the responsibility to identify to the potential consultant any known persons of the church who may have issues that could be explosive so that contingency plans may be made by the team.

### **3. Mediation Training and Experience**

Church conflicts are resolved as key individuals central to the conflict(s) are reconciled. That means the consultant must be an experienced mediator. Preferably, the lead consultant should be a *Certified Christian Conciliator*<sup>™</sup> with the Institute for Christian Conciliation (a division of Peacemaker Ministries), with additional training in church conflict intervention. A mediator with the same or similar church tradition as the parties may be helpful.

### **4. Church Conflict Intervention Experience**

As this book has pointed out, church conflicts involving large groups of people are the most challenging environments for the work of reconciliation and peacemaking. The consultant attempting such work must have a thorough understanding of the many considerations and the many forces at play in such an environment. This is not a place for an amateur. Many churches desire to conduct a personal interview with the potential consultant in order to explore their convictions concerning various theological positions that may be part of the church's present conflicts. A professional consultant should be able to intelligently discuss such matters and ensure church leaders that their personal convictions and/or bias will not influence their work.

### **5. Leadership Ability**

The consultant must be a confident leader able to face the strongest personalities of the church and not be intimidated. He or she should be a person of public presence, able to lead potentially divisive group meetings. The consultant should be a person worthy of everyone's trust and from whom all will take advice and counsel. There is a certain quality of self-assertiveness that the consultant must bear as a character trait that will also allow members of the church to accept their leadership. Of course, the

consultant must be a deeply committed Christian who brings evidence of his or her own deep need for the leadership of Christ.

### **RULES, PROCEDURES, AND “SUCCESS” RATE**

Hiring a professional church conflict consultant is similar to engaging the services of an expert in any other subject-matter. Thus, the consultant’s proposal should include specifications regarding the rules, procedures, and administrative aspects of the consultant’s services. The scope of the consultant’s work should be clearly set forth in writing (the Professional Consulting Agreement) before any work is commenced. This contract will include the date and length of the engagement; what the cost will be, and when and how payments are to be made; and the specific *Rules* that the church and consultant agree will govern the services to be performed.

You should ask how your potential consultant defines success. Do they guarantee an increase in attendance or the stabilization of donation amounts? Or do they define success as *faithfulness*? At the end of our time serving on a conflicted church intervention team, we describe our efforts as successful if every person involved in the church conflict can say:

*The Word of God was faithfully proclaimed. I am more confident in who God is and I see more clearly how he calls me to demonstrate my love for him by my obedience to him and my love for my fellow Christians. I recognize that no matter how personal this church conflict feels, it’s not all about me. This is God’s church and I have a role to play in contributing to the God-honoring resolution of these conflicts and the promotion of the unity of the saints.*

Be wary if a consultant guarantees that every immediate problem in your conflicted church will be fixed. There is rarely 100% harmony and unity among people associated with a church conflict. But within our definition of redeeming church conflict, every church member and leader can be successful in redeeming the church conflict because every church member and leader can be faithful.

Even within this definition of success, however, any consultant should also explain how they are going to help your church move towards a definitive resolution of the conflicts *inasmuch as it is possible*. The consultant should not merely offer a conflict management approach—that would only prolong the destructive influence of church conflicts. Rather, for the sake of Christ’s reputation in the world, God calls on his people to do all they can to bring a definite end to conflict.

### **ONGOING CONTACT**

You should have a clear understanding of how much ongoing contact you will be invited to have in the future. As professional mediators who have served conflicted churches, one of our greatest joys is hearing from former clients. Years after a church intervention, we will receive an email with an encouraging report of how the Lord is ministering to and through a specific church. A leader will reach out to us for advice on a new crisis or conflict. We hear great stories like grandchildren being born into a church that years ago seemed on the brink of closure; like a new missionary venture being launched from a previously ingrown church; and like the ministerial impact of a youth program initiated by an otherwise elderly congregation ... and we rejoice.

God is great and glorious and he loves the church! So do we!

God bless you and grant you great wisdom as you prayerfully consider hiring a consultant to help your church with its current conflicts.