

Associated Canadian Theological Schools

Trinity Western University

Langley, British Columbia

**Conflict as a Crucible for Spiritual Transformation
in Congregational Leaders**

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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry

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Abstract

This Project investigates the intersection of conflict, congregational leadership, and spiritual formation. In particular, the primary goal of this Project is to discern factors that enabled congregational leaders to experience spiritual formation in situations where conflict was directed at them from within their congregations. This kind of conflict is a painful reality within Canadian evangelical congregations, as well as other communities of faith.

In 2011, data was gathered from leaders of English-speaking congregations across Canada serving in six evangelical denominations. More than four out of five of the 496 respondents reported experiences of conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations.

Some of these leaders reported personal growth in and through an experience of such conflict. What critical factors did they claim contributed to, or accompanied, their own spiritual formation?

A review of current literature, an examination of biblical and theological principles, and an analysis of data from the national survey, identified eight factors in the lives of congregational leaders that enabled them to survive conflict and, in some cases, to become more Christ-like.

The eight factors identified and surveyed in this research are an existing intimacy with God; a functioning biblical theology; training for wholesome and competent behaviour; practising spiritual disciplines; being oriented to, or in, one's call; attending to emotional and mental health; attending to physical health; and, relating to others.

A number of recommendations have been offered to current and aspiring congregational leaders to prepare them for the probable event of conflict. The hope is that congregational leaders will be better equipped to experience conflict as a crucible for spiritual formation.

Key terms: conflict, identity, leaders, leadership, congregational leaders, spiritual formation, personal development.

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Soli Deo Gloria

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

“**crucible** /kru:səbəl/ *n.* **1** a container in which metals etc. are heated.
2 a severe test or trial.”¹

Conflict happens. Too often conflict is toxic, but it can produce wholesome results.

Even though ten years had passed, Paul still periodically recalled a painful incident in a previous congregation. To this day he does not understand what happened, or what the real cause for the personal attack had been, but it had been relentless. The elders of the church either had been unable or unwilling to deal with those who had challenged Paul’s ministry and leadership within the church. Other leaders and members within the congregation had failed or refused to support him, or even intervene in the conflict. As a result Paul’s confidence, credibility and effectiveness were eroded. He voluntarily resigned from his leadership position and withdrew from all ministry involvement in the church community with the hope of encouraging a resolution of the conflict – but no resolution occurred.

The conflict disrupted his home life: his wife and children were not immune to the stress and confusion that began to infect every area of life. Paul became increasingly irritable, despondent and withdrawn, perhaps even depressed. As he frequently mulled over the injustice and meaninglessness of the whole affair, he often experienced deep emotional reactions of anger, bitterness, even hatred. His health and relationships began to deteriorate.

Now as he looked back over the intervening years, Paul knew how easily it could have been to have given up everything – he knew of others who had in similar circumstances. And yet, as he considered his life over the last decade he wondered at the path he had

¹ *The Canadian Oxford Paperback Dictionary* (2000), s.v. “crucible.”

walked: he was now leading and teaching in a growing congregation in another city; his marriage was stronger and his children doing well; he himself had experienced spiritual growth; in many positive ways he was a different person. Even though the conflict remained unresolved, as he reflected upon the reasons for the changes and growth in his life, he began to identify some of the factors that had made the difference between what he might have become, and who he now was.

Although “Paul” is a pseudonym, his experiences are a composite of real-life situations. His journey through conflict reflects an all-too-common situation for many leaders within Canadian Christian congregations.

How prevalent and toxic are the conflicts directed at leaders from within their own Christian congregations?

A. Problem Developed

The prevalence and toxicity of conflict directed against leaders within Christian congregations is a significant reason why this issue needs to be explored. There are numerous studies on the pervasiveness of conflict within congregations as a major cause for the attrition of pastors and other leaders. In *Pastors in Transition*, Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger concluded that “one of two main reasons why ministers left parish ministry was the stress of dealing with conflict. ... Unresolved conflict ... is ministers’ most prevalent motivation for leaving local church ministry.”²

² Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 76 and 98.

In 2004, *Christianity Today International* conducted a survey of 506 pastors in the United States (CTI Report).³ Of these respondents, 79% reported the experience of conflict aimed at them personally; 13% indicated that they were currently experiencing some personally directed conflict. Nearly 40% reported that they had left a local church ministry, at least in part, because of conflict. Perhaps one weakness of this report is that the respondents were people still in pastoral ministry; those who had “fallen out” as casualties of conflict were not respondents. Therefore, it is conceivable that the negative effects of this type of conflict are significantly higher than reported.

The CTI Report indicated that more than half of the respondents described their initial response to conflict centered on them personally as “defensive” or “angry,” or both. One-third or more of those respondents noted that they were “shocked” or “overwhelmed.”⁴ Although these leaders did acknowledge some positive effects of such conflict (i.e., wiser, purifying process and better defined vision), 306 of the respondents claimed negative effects among which the most common three were damaged relationships, sadness and loss of trust.

Kenneth Newberger confirms and expands the list of negative impacts of conflict upon congregational leaders including:⁵

³ Eric Reed, “Leadership Surveys Church Conflict,” *Leadership* 25/4 (2004): 25-26. The report upon which this article is based was prepared by *Christianity Today International* and is entitled “Managing Church Conflict: The Source, Pastors Reactions and Its Effects,” <http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/downloads/churchresearch/cr12.html> (accessed June 22, 2010). Hereinafter this report will be referred to as the “CTI Report.”

The CTI Report has been favourably referred to in other literature. For example, some of its results are specifically incorporated within a publication produced by *Faith Communities Today* in conjunction with the *Hartford Institute of Religion Research* which may be accessed at <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/all/themes/factzen4/files/InsightsIntoCongregationalConflict.pdf>.

⁴ CTI Report, 15.

⁵ Kenneth C. Newberger, “Conflict Today and in the 1st Century,” http://www.resolvechurchconflict.com/.../preview/slide_14 (accessed May 18, 2010). At the date of completion of this dissertation, this resource no longer appeared to be accessible.

- loss of trust with those with whom the leader works;
- increased tension during meetings;
- loss of ministry focus;
- increased exhaustion and burnout;
- degraded decision-making;
- increased stress in one's family;
- physical health issues;
- despondency and depression; and,
- leaving ministry.

Many Christian leaders leave ministry permanently as a result of conflict. Ron Susek quotes conflict management expert Edward Peirce as saying that 50 percent of the pastors who are harmed at phase three of congregational conflict (on a continuum of six phases of increasing intensity) do not return to the ministry.⁶

In *Clergy Killers*, Lloyd Rediger begins with this statement:

Abuse of pastors by congregations and the break-down of pastors due to inadequate support are now tragic realities. This worst-case scenario for the church, one that is increasing in epidemic proportions, is not a misinterpretation by a few discontented clergy. Rather, it is a phenomenon that is verified by both research and experience.⁷

⁶ Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 47.

⁷ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 1. Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 23, affirms Rediger's statement and relates his own personal experience of such "abuse at the hands of clergy killers."

Speed Leas, senior consultant for the Alban Institute, is somewhat critical of Rediger's tone and approach and writes that "I worry that he is operating more from anger than reason."⁸ Nevertheless, Leas agrees with Rediger's identification of the problem. Another researcher observes that "Recent studies continue to report increasing levels of clergy burnout, emotionally damaging interpersonal conflict, and decreasing average length of service in congregations."⁹

The toxicity of such conflict is not limited to congregational leaders under attack. As noted by Newberger, and others,¹⁰ the conflict flows into, and negatively impacts, the leader's ministry, family and other relationships, as well as general congregational life. Therefore, conflict directed against a leader also has an actual or potential damaging effect upon other individuals, the congregation's well-being and mission, and the Christian community at large.

The intent of this study is to contribute to a general understanding of the nature of conflict, and to discover how certain leaders have not only survived conflict, but also grown through the experience.

B. Context and Potential Value of this Study

This brief survey of the problem of conflict directed against leaders of Christian congregations has been well documented, analyzed and publicized. Over the years the author has interacted with congregational leaders who had experienced, or were

⁸ Speed Leas, review of *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack*, by G. Lloyd Rediger, *Christian Century* 115/21 (1998), 727.

⁹ Ronald S. Beebe, "Predicting Burnout, Conflict Management Style, and Turnover Among Clergy," *Journal of Career Assessment* 15/2 (2007): 257.

¹⁰ For one example see Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 97-123.

experiencing, conflict directed at them personally. These contacts, together with a certain autobiographical component, put a “face” on the issue. Most of these leaders were undergoing severe personal, family and vocational turmoil. They were asking questions such as: “Why is God allowing this?”; “How can I deal with this?”; “Is there any purpose in what is happening?”; and, “Why should I keep serving?”

Although there are numerous congregational leaders who have been casualties of conflict, there are others who have come through these intense times of discord stronger, wiser and godlier. Did they consider the turmoil a waste? Did they receive answers to their questions? How did they become better congregational leaders? How do they explain their personal growth and transformation in, and through, the conflict? Current and future congregational leaders need to hear the answers to these and other questions.

The responses to these questions could be valuable for a number of reasons. First, for those who are experiencing conflict it has the prospect of providing hope. The examples of leaders who have been transformed by conflict directed at them provide encouragement to others not only in the promise of a positive purpose and a beneficial outcome during a time of disorientation and pain, but also in the assurance that leaders experiencing conflict are not unique or alone.

Second, the insights of leaders transformed by such conflict should equip other leaders to engage their own incidents of conflict in a healthy and informed manner. These insights could be developed and used in a variety of practical settings including one-to-one counseling with leaders in conflict, and training for aspiring leaders.

Third, it is anticipated that leaders transformed by conflict will be able to identify significant contributing elements that are applicable to all the people of God. In this way,

leaders can teach and model spiritual formation to other followers of Jesus in and through wholesome and competent responses to conflict. In turn, the health and effectiveness of Christian congregations can be improved, and the mission of the Church enhanced.

Most of the author's ecclesial and vocational environment has been Canadian evangelical Christian congregations. Therefore, it is within that context that this study will be conducted. Despite this constraint, it is intended that this study benefit the larger constituencies of the Church and society in general.

C. Some Terms Defined

Several terms have been introduced and will be used to shape the research question: congregational leader and leadership; congregation; conflict; evangelical; and, spiritual formation. Although some of these terms will be explored further in this study, the following preliminary definitions are provided.

First, a "congregational leader," for purposes of this study, will refer to any person who is in a governance position within a congregation. The culture of many, if not most, congregations under consideration will typically identify those leaders as pastors, but leaders may also include those serving as elders, deacons, teachers, Sunday school superintendents, directors and chairpersons of ministry teams or committees, or some other formally recognized position of governance leadership within a congregation. References to the more general term "leadership" will be understood as "influence, the ability of one person to

influence others to follow his or her lead.”¹¹ Therefore, a leader is one who exercises leadership.

Second, “congregation” or “Christian congregation” will be used to refer to those people who compose a local church, assembly, or *ekklēsia*.¹² A Christian congregation is an identifiable localized community of people. It presumes that these people are Christians, or at least claim to be Christians, and that they relate to each other in a manner that affirms some degree of permanence and commitment to each other. Biblical metaphors evoking the nature of a local church, or congregation, include a body (i.e., individual parts assembled as a body – e.g., Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12), a planted field (i.e., individual plants forming a cultivated field – e.g., 1 Cor. 3:6-9), a building or temple (i.e., individual stones arranged as a building – e.g., 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Peter Steinke likens a congregation to a living system or an organism that reflects “how people care for, respond to, and manage their life together.”¹³

Third, a typical and preliminary definition of “conflict” is a “disagreement between interdependent people; it is the perception of incompatible or mutually exclusive needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals.”¹⁴ This definition is specific to social or interpersonal conflict. Other aspects of conflict will be introduced later. Other types of conflict that will be considered include role conflict as a subset of social or interpersonal conflict, and intrapersonal conflict (i.e., conflict within an individual). As proposed later, one hypothesis of this research is that the source of conflict is deeper than indicated by this preliminary

¹¹ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: A Commitment to Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2007), 27.

¹² The Greek word *ekklēsia* (transliterated into English), is usually translated as “congregation,” “assembly,” or “church.”

¹³ Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herdon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996), vii-x.

¹⁴ Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, ed., *Making Peace with Conflict* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1999), 23. The definition supplied by Schrock-Shenk and Ressler is “a disagreement between interdependent people; it is the perception of incompatible or mutually exclusive needs or goals. Put more simply, conflict equals differences plus tension.”

definition. This hypothesis proposes that a person's or group's identity is at or near the root of conflict.

Fourth, "evangelical" is a term that has been used in a variety of ways, some more restrictive than others.¹⁵ Thomas Oden's definition is sufficient for this project as it incorporates those denominations that have participated in this research:

By *evangelical* we embrace all those who faithfully believe and joyfully receive the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. In particular we are thinking of those who even today deliberately remain under the intentional discipline of ancient ecumenical consensual teaching and classic Lutheran, Calvinist, Baptist, or Wesleyan connections of spiritual formation, especially in their renewing phases, freely subject to classical Christian teaching, admonition, and guidance.¹⁶

Fifth, the description of "spiritual formation" proposed by James C. Wilhoit will be adopted: "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."¹⁷ When commenting upon literature that is not overtly Christian, it may be helpful to widen the scope of consideration to concepts such as "personal development" or "personal growth." Although these latter terms are more general than spiritual formation, common or useful principles may be discerned from them that could enrich an understanding of the scope and nature of spiritual formation.

¹⁵ Oden's description is consistent with the four qualities of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism identified by David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17. An example of a precise, and somewhat restricted, description of "evangelical" is used by the Barna Research Group. Its identification of evangelicals includes the defined term "born again Christians" plus seven other characteristics. Reference can be made to the text of these terms at <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/14-media/343-super-bowl-ad-research-new-barna-study-examines-tebowfocus-commercial> (accessed March 2, 2010).

¹⁶ Thomas C. Oden, "The Death of Modernity and Postmodern Evangelical Spirituality," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 2nd ed., ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 20.

¹⁷ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

D. Hypotheses and Research Question

This project proposes three fundamental hypotheses. First, as indicated earlier, a typical and preliminary definition of conflict (in particular, interpersonal or social conflict) is “disagreement between interdependent people; it is the perception of incompatible or mutually exclusive needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals.” However, what causes a person or group to possess certain “needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals” that are “incompatible” with another person or group? It is proposed that the underlying identity of a person or group, in large measure, defines that person’s or group’s “needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals.” Therefore, a hypothesis of this research is that identity is at or near the root of conflict.¹⁸

Second, conflict is a form of trial, or metaphorically a “crucible,” that is, or can be, the place or occasion for spiritual formation of a congregational leader. As will become apparent from this research, spiritual formation is the process of a person’s identity becoming more Christ-like.

Third, congregational leaders who have experienced conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations, and who have continued in leadership, are able to recognize significant crises, responses, interventions, relationships and other factors that made a positive difference for them in responding to, and processing, the conflict. In addition, in the aftermath of such conflict, they will be able to identify what contributed to their personal growth, or spiritual formation. In support of this hypothesis, it is noted that

¹⁸ Some authors cite identity as one of several possible “incompatible goals,” or ingredients, to conflict. For instance, Carol Dempsey and Elayne Shapiro [*Reading the Bible, Transforming Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 11] understand “incompatible goals” as including content, relationship, process and identity. In their case, they define identity as “how a person wants to be seen by others.” In this Project, identity is understood to be how a person answers the question “Who am I?” As such, this Project’s understanding of identity is more than how others perceive an individual or group, or how a person or group wants to be perceived by others.

respondents in the CTI Report¹⁹ were able to identify the sources of personal conflict, their initial responses, and their means of managing, or attempting to manage, such conflict.

Based on the problem as earlier examined, together with these hypotheses, the research question for this study is: “**Among leaders of Canadian Evangelical congregations who have experienced congregational conflict directed at them personally, what critical factors do they claim have contributed to their own spiritual formation?**” This primary question raises a number of relevant secondary questions that guide the descriptive and appreciative investigation of this research project, including:

- How do leaders describe their experiences of spiritual transformation in the context of conflicts, and what principles can be discerned from these descriptions for the benefit of others?
- What have been major sources of conflict directed at congregational leaders?
- How have such leaders responded to conflict directed at them, and what have been negative and positive effects of such conflict?
- What have been some of the variables that make the incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders more, or less, likely?
- What, if any, are the similarities and dissimilarities between the American and Canadian experiences of conflict directed at congregational leaders?

¹⁹ CTI Report, 13-17.

E. Research Design for the Project

For purposes of this project, participation was sought from the six evangelical Canadian denominations that composed ACTS Seminaries.²⁰ All of these denominations consented to participation in this project at the national level. This arrangement allowed for the potential of a large sample size of a wide spectrum of leaders from Canadian evangelical congregations. It was also anticipated that the responses would elicit a breadth of experiences that would allow credible comparative analyses for mutually beneficial purposes.

The nature of the research question suggests a descriptive and appreciative inquiry. The potentially large sample size necessitated a self-reporting survey with data requested and collected at one point in time. This approach appeared to be most practical, not only for contact and response, but also for analysis.

In order to collect comparative material quantitative data was required. To allow respondents to identify their own conflict, and tell their own “stories” in their own way pointed toward qualitative material. As a result, the survey involved mixed methods procedures; that is, it combined both quantitative and qualitative data to allow for collection of data that is not only objective and measureable, but also subjective and reflective. Given the nature of this project and the investigative process, this author concluded that the qualitative responses were expected to provide data that was more probative in answering the

²⁰ Up to May 2010, ACTS was a consortium of seminaries from the following denominations: Baptist General Conference of Canada (BGCC), Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC), Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada (CMAC), Evangelical Free Church of Canada (EFCC), Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada (EFCC), and Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). In or about May 2010 CMAC amicably withdrew from ACTS in order to fulfil its obligations at Ambrose University College (Calgary, Alberta). Despite having withdrawn from ACTS at the time the survey was conducted, CMAC readily agreed to participate in this research.

research question; that is, identifying critical factors that contributed to leaders' spiritual formation. In addition, many of the quantitative questions were directed at determining context for reported events of conflict rather than identifying critical factors contributing to spiritual formation. On these bases, it was proposed that the qualitative responses should be weighted more heavily than the quantitative.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative responses would also enable a limited comparison of those two types of responses. Given the proposed priority of the qualitative responses, the quantitative responses would be secondary yet still important. The comparison of these two types of responses may confirm responses or identify inconsistencies in the qualitative reflections. They may also permit a comparison with the CTI Report thereby indicating potential differences between Canadian and American experiences.

To facilitate the dissemination of the survey, and the analysis of its responses, a partnership agreement was entered into with Outreach Canada (OC).²¹ This agreement enabled the use of OC's technical expertise and other resources for the publication of a website survey, as well as the collection and analysis of the survey responses.

It is acknowledged that the process of completing a survey of this nature may have been a painful, yet cathartic, experience for respondents. Therefore it was necessary to ensure that the respondents were adequately cautioned and protected.

It was not presumed that the respondents were without blame in their identified incidents of conflict. For example, reasons for conflict may have been legitimately based upon a congregational leader's immoral behaviour (e.g., theft of funds, or sexual

²¹ Outreach Canada serves churches and Christian leaders from many denominations and affiliations throughout Canada. Its website may be accessed at <http://en.outreach.ca/Start.aspx>.

impropriety) or fundamental doctrinal error (e.g., denying the deity or humanity of Jesus Christ). These situations might be identifiable based upon a respondent's "story" or self-reported source of conflict. For instance, one survey question regarding conflict sources provides responses that include "theological/doctrinal issue(s)" and "moral issue(s)." This variable raises the question as to whether conflict linked with these kinds of issues should be treated differently. In other words, does conflict caused by immoral behaviour or unorthodox beliefs have a similar potential for spiritual formation in a congregational leader? Analysis of such data should be sensitive to the possibility that elements of such conflict may be different.

Each of the participating denominations invited its pastors and other leaders of English-speaking congregations to participate in an on-line survey. Limiting the sample to English-speaking congregations was intended to avoid, or to some extent minimize, the variables of cultural differences. It was presumed that different cultures deal with conflict in diverse ways.²² This delimitation is not intended as a value judgment upon other cultures. Indeed, it is hoped that future studies specific to leaders of culturally diverse congregations within Canada will be undertaken.

The responses to the survey were then analyzed to address three general inquiries. First, was a comparison between the experiences of Canadian congregational leaders in this study, and the American responses in the CTI Report. This would address the validity of any implicit presumption that the two experiences are similar, if not the same. Second, was the identification of variables that may make the incidence of conflict directed at congregational

²² See for example, Kevin Avruch, *Culture and Conflict Resolution* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1998); Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993); John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1995).

leaders more, or less, likely. Third, and directly linked to the primary research question, was the categorization and analysis of factors that respondents claimed not only enabled them to survive or endure conflict directed at them personally, but also contributed to their spiritual formation.

F. General Biblical and Theological Foundations

In the search for answers to the perceived problems of congregational leadership, conflict and spiritual formation, certain parameters need to be identified.

First, solutions are sought within the bounds of Scripture, by which is meant the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible. It is in these texts that there is revealed the nature of God and humans; the relationship of humans with God, each other and creation; the distortion of these relationships by sin; and, the divine restoration enacted through Jesus Christ. As such it is anticipated crucial factors will be discovered in Scripture regarding the spiritual formation of congregational leaders in the crucible of conflict.

The life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the narratives of Moses (e.g., Numbers 12; 14; 16; 20:1-13), David (e.g., Absalom's rebellion), Jeremiah, Paul (e.g., 1 and 2 Corinthians), and others provide fertile ground for investigating, among other things, the nature and dynamic of leaders, congregations, conflict and spiritual formation.

Second, by seeking solutions in Scripture the contributions of human experience, research and practice are not eliminated or dismissed. However, the proposals of worldviews that discount or minimize the voice of Scripture presume perspectives or biases which distort, among other things, the values of God, the constitution of humanity, the nature of conflict, and the functions of leadership. Therefore contributions and insights from such

fields as sociology and psychology are subject to passing through the grid of Scripture. As a result, some perspectives and practices of leadership and conflict will be eliminated, or diminished, as they contradict or distort biblical principles. However, other perspectives will provide helpful insights and practical applications which enable biblical principles.²³

One further caution is worth noting at this point. A growing number of researchers on conflict, and its resolution or management, observe that “Western problem-solving models of conflict resolution are not culturally universal as some authors claim. Rather they reflect unacknowledged cultural underpinnings of Western worldview.”²⁴ In the context of a Christian congregation, this position may be pressed further to say that such Western models of conflict resolution potentially reflect presumptions of modernity. Thus, additional care needs to be taken to ensure that in generalizing findings in this project we are not simply “baptizing” presumptions and biases of modernity. In this regard, it is proposed that a vigorous approach be taken to scrutinizing sociological and psychological models in the light of Scripture.

G. Conclusion

This study is situated at the intersection of conflict, leadership and spiritual formation within the context of Canadian evangelical congregational leaders. The negative results of conflict directed at such leaders appear to be well-documented. What is not so well known is how leaders have processed conflict directed against them in ways that are wholesome and

²³ With some caution, it is suggested that one approach that shows promise and has borne some fruitful contributions to church leadership is Family Systems Theory. For an application of this theory, see the example of James E. Lamkin, “Systems Theory and Congregational Leadership: Leaves from an Alchemist’s Journal,” *Review and Expositor* 102/3 (2005): 461-489.

²⁴ Polly O. Walker, “Decolonizing Conflict Resolution: Addressing the Ontological Violence of Westernization,” *American Indian Quarterly* 28 (2004): 545.

transformative. The purpose of this project is not so much about how congregational leaders resolve, manage or transform conflict; rather it is about how conflict can transform leaders.

Chapter two of this project will undertake a review of current literature at and near the intersection of conflict, leaders and spiritual formation. Chapter three will present a biblical and theological foundation for an understanding of spiritual formation, conflict and leadership and how they interact with each other. This will be attempted by examining the lives of various biblical characters who experienced conflict directed at them from among those they led. In chapter four the methodology of the research for this project will be described and an analysis of the data presented. The final chapter, among other things, will state some of the findings and recommendations indicated by this study.

Chapter 2 - Review of Current Literature and Theoretical Foundations

*A crucible is, by definition, a transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or an altered sense of identity.*²⁵

This chapter will review current literature located at or near the intersection of the three core elements of this project: conflict, leadership and spiritual formation.

The amount written on each of these elements is extensive, and therefore some limits must be placed on what will be surveyed. As the context of this research is present-day Canadian evangelical Christian congregational leaders, it is proposed that a prudent starting point is to examine the literature that is commonly accessible to those leaders. As appropriate, other books, articles and authors will be included in this review. Such inclusion will be exercised, for example, if a particular writer or title is referred to in texts that are part of the starting point. The result will be far from exhaustive, but it is intended to be a reasonably comprehensive consideration of the materials to which an informed Canadian evangelical leader of an English speaking congregation could refer.

The movement of this chapter will first briefly explore the nature and dynamic of conflict. Second, it will consider the nature of leadership, particularly as it overlaps with conflict. Third, it will investigate aspects of how leaders grow or are transformed by conflict. Particular attention will be given to the process of transformation referred to as Christian spiritual formation. Lastly, eight factors will be recognized in the literature under

²⁵ Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas, "Crucibles of Leadership," *Harvard Business Review* 80/9 (2002): 40.

review. These factors have been discerned in the literature as useful for enabling congregational leaders to survive or endure conflict; a few authors commented on how some of these factors may contribute to spiritual formation or growth in leaders experiencing conflict.

A. Conflict

This review of current literature on conflict will generally address five issues: (1) definitions of interpersonal, role and intrapersonal conflict; (2) sources of conflict; (3) the relationship of identity to conflict; (4) the consideration of whether conflict is good, bad or value-neutral; and, (5) the potential for conflict to be constructive and transformative.

Three general categories of conflict are relevant to this project: interpersonal or social conflict, role conflict, and intrapersonal conflict.

In the preceding chapter, a preliminary definition of interpersonal or social conflict was provided: “disagreement between interdependent people; it is the perception of incompatible or mutually exclusive needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals.”²⁶ Broken down into its component parts, this conflict involves two or more people, or groups of people; some measure of connection or interdependency between those persons or groups; and, a point of actual or perceived disagreement between them.

A material subset of interpersonal conflict is role conflict. On occasion, interpersonal conflict is directed at a person simply because of his or her position or role (viz., the role of

²⁶ Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, ed., *Making Peace with Conflict* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1999), 23. As indicated earlier, the definition supplied by Schrock-Shenk and Ressler is “a disagreement between interdependent people; it is the perception of incompatible or mutually exclusive needs or goals. Put more simply, conflict equals differences plus tension.”

pastor or other congregational leader). The particular causes of this type of conflict usually involve differences in role definitions, expectations or responsibilities rather than anything directly related to the individual in that role. In such cases a clear distinction needs to be made between the role and the individual in that role; between a leader's professional "role" and personal "self."²⁷

A third type of conflict is intrapersonal, or within a person. Such internal struggles may have any number of actual or perceived causes. In terms of psychology and organizational behaviour, intrapersonal conflict is generally understood to be the struggle between what a person *wants* to do (or perhaps, has done) and what that person *should* do (or, should have done).²⁸

Among modern evangelical writers, the origin of conflict is typically explained by recourse to Genesis 3. Alfred Poirier writes that "from Genesis 3 to Revelation 21, the Bible is a book abounding with conflict – (humanity) against God, God against (humanity), (human) against (human)."²⁹ This position informs and shapes much of what is written by these authors about conflict. For instance, William Diehl asserts that "Conflict is a manifestation of human's self-centeredness, that is, original sin."³⁰ Jim Van Yperen declares

²⁷ Ron Fisher, "Sources of Conflict and Methods of Conflict Resolution," http://www.aupeace.org/files/Fisher_SourcesofConflictandMethodsofResolution.pdf (accessed February 24, 2011). See also, Norma Cook Everist, *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004), 54-64; and Robert L. Randall, *Pastor and Parish: The Psychological Core of Ecclesiastical Conflicts* (New York, NY: Human Sciences Press, 1988), 133.

²⁸ Kathleen M. O'Connor, Carsten K. W. De Dreu, Holly Schroth, Bruce Barry, Terri R. Lituchy and Max H. Bazerman, "What We Want to Do Versus What We Think We Should Do: An Empirical Investigation of Intrapersonal Conflict," *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* 15 (2002): 403-418.

²⁹ Alfred Poirier, *The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 185. The parenthetical insertions of 'humanity' or 'human' are substitutions for Poirier's use of 'man'. See also Kenneth C. Newberger, *Hope in the Face of Conflict: Making Peace with Others the Way God Makes Peace with Us* ([unspecified]: Three Sons, SDM, 2009), 35-43.

³⁰ William Diehl, "Workplace Conflict," in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*, ed. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 215.

that “conflict is the result of unwarranted and unfulfilled desire. It is unwarranted because the desire is for personal pleasure and self-promotion, not for understanding or seeking God’s will. It is unfulfilled because our motive, like our desire, is self-seeking.”³¹

Commenting on causes of congregational conflict, Van Yperen states that “all church conflict is always about leadership, character, and community.”³² Ken Sande recognizes four primary causes of (congregational) conflict: misunderstandings resulting from poor communication; differences in values, goals, gifts, calling, priorities, expectations, interests, or opinions; competition over limited resources; and, sinful attitudes and habits that lead to sinful words and actions.³³ Ron Susek includes categories such as culturally learned resistance to authority, rapid church growth, marketability of the leader, culture crashing, empire building, and hidden agendas.³⁴ With respect to congregational leaders, Susek has observed that “When a pastor becomes the focus of legitimate complaints, almost inevitably the problem will be found in one of four areas: truth, relationship, integrity, or mission.”³⁵ Of course, complaints may be directed at leaders that are not legitimate.

Another source of conflict, particularly against congregational leaders, is difficult people variously identified as “well-intentioned dragons,”³⁶ “antagonists,”³⁷ “pathological

³¹ Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2002), 94.

³² Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 24; see variations of this statement at pages 55 and 233.

³³ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 30-31.

³⁴ Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 90-104.

³⁵ Susek, *Firestorm*, 69.

³⁶ Marshall Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Word, 1985).

³⁷ Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988).

antagonists,³⁸ or “clergy killers.”³⁹ The levels and motivations of antagonists vary. Lloyd Rediger claims they are motivated by evil: “The etiology or origin of the clergy killer phenomenon is not mysterious, for the church has always been confronted by evil.”⁴⁰ Haugk, Greenfield and Boers generally identify three types of antagonists: hard-core (i.e., Rediger’s “clergy killer”), major (i.e., a person who probably has a character or personality disorder), and moderate (i.e., a person with less severe personality problems). Greenfield bluntly states: “All three of the above types are malevolent in both intent and effect. I am distinguishing here somewhat between degrees of meanness.”⁴¹

In summary, various authors have attributed conflict against congregational leaders to original sin, antagonists, and certain issues. Although these indicate points at which conflicts commonly occur, they do not seem to satisfactorily answer why conflict occurs at these points. It is proposed that a deeper cause of conflict is present. Van Yperen acknowledges this when he concludes that “Church conflict is always systemic, never simple; usually far more theological than interpersonal. When church leaders look only at events and interpersonal concerns, they address the symptoms, not the cause.”⁴²

At a deeper level, conflict occurs when something challenges or confronts the identity of a person or group. In *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf provides an insightful analysis of conflict at international, inter-racial and inter-cultural levels. He reflects upon three seemingly disconnected situations in three cities: the rise of Nazism in Berlin during

³⁸ Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 35-57.

³⁹ Lloyd G. Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

⁴⁰ Rediger, *Clergy Killers*, 19.

⁴¹ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 39.

⁴² Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 222.

the 1930s; the racial upheaval in Los Angeles in 1992; and, the atrocities of Sarajevo during the recent Balkan conflict. As a Croat, Volf recognizes that the Balkan conflict had much to do with a person's identity as a Croat or as a Serb. He acknowledges that the same is true of the other situations of conflict concluding that "the problem of ethnic and cultural conflicts is part of a larger problem of identity and otherness."⁴³ Identity need not be limited to nationality or ethnicity; it also extends to ideology (e.g., democracy vs. communism), economics (e.g., poor vs. rich), gender, politics, and religion.

Although this association between conflict and identity is evidenced at the macro-level of nations, ethnicities and cultures, is this linkage also true at the micro-level of interpersonal, role and intrapersonal conflicts? Larry Dunn echoes Volf's conclusions at these micro-levels as he writes: "... conflict is related to identity. The things we care about most deeply are likely to engage us in the greatest conflict."⁴⁴

What is identity, and how is it related to conflict?

Identity, or self-identity, "is basically each person's answer to the question 'Who am I?'"⁴⁵ Commenting on the formation of a person's identity, William Kirwan observes that:

Our views about ourselves are molded largely by the reflective appraisals we receive from people significant in our lives. Parents, siblings, friends, and peers are all mirrors by which we receive feedback about how we are acting: those individuals constantly indicate how they feel toward us. ... Their views contribute to our answer to the question "Who am I?"⁴⁶

⁴³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 16.

⁴⁴ Larry Dunn, "Transforming Identity in Conflict," in *Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation*, ed. Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler (Scottsdale, PA/ Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1999), 38-39.

⁴⁵ William T. Kirwan, *Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling: A Case for Integrating Psychology and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 74.

⁴⁶ Kirwan, *Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling*, 74-75.

Robert Randall investigates self and identity in greater depth from a psychological perspective. He writes that “... the self is *the* psychological bedrock of our being, upon which all that we are is founded. ... the self as the psychological core of our being is the basis by which a person is more or less successful in forging and sustaining any identity at all.”⁴⁷

Components that contribute to the identity of a person, an organization, a cultural group, a nation or an ethnic group include ideology, values, nationality, ethnicity, gender, social class, economic status, and religion. Philomena Mwaura states: “Identity can be a source of one’s sense of empowerment, and subsequently an agent of healing; alternatively it can be a source of tension and conflicts.”⁴⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that this project’s preliminary definition of interpersonal conflict is disagreement over such matters as needs, ideas, beliefs, values, goals, means and resources – the stuff of personal identity. As such, disagreement on these matters touches, confronts, challenges and conflicts with the core of a person’s identity. For example, as a person’s belief or value is materially challenged the typical initial reaction is to defend and protect that belief or value because it is part of that person’s answer to “Who am I?”.

It would appear that the source of conflict lies closer to the point at which a person’s or a group’s identity is confronted or challenged. Who a person is, or perceives himself or herself to be, in some degree resists and reacts to anything that is not consistent with that identity.

⁴⁷ Randall, *Pastor and Parish*, 19.

⁴⁸ Philomena Njeri Mwaura, “Human Identity and the Gospel of Reconciliation: Agenda for Mission Studies and Praxis in the 21st Century: An African Reflection,” *Mission Studies* 26/1 (2009): 18.

The next issue to be considered is whether conflict is negative, positive or value neutral. In other words, is the point at which an identity is confronted or challenged to be considered negative, positive or value neutral? The way in which a congregational leader answers this question will contribute to how he or she responds to, and processes, conflict.

Ron Susek views conflict as negative stating that:

There are those who pound their chests and bravely declare, 'Conflict is good.' I disagree. Either they have never been bloodied by conflict, or they have spent too many weekends at self-motivation seminars becoming adept at denying reality. Indeed, you may find good in overcoming conflict, but conflict itself is not good; it is not a product of the peaceable work of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹

These are broad statements that invite some qualifications.

Numerous authors take the position that conflict is value neutral.⁵⁰ After observing that conflict is one of the two main reasons for ministers leaving parish ministry, Hoge and Wenger state "Conflict is part of life; psychologists consistently remind us that it should not be seen as something inherently bad. It is an inevitable part of any close relationship, especially relationships in which people have a strong personal investment."⁵¹ George Bullard writes that "... conflict begins as a neutral value. People interpret conflict as positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy."⁵² Kenneth Haugk argues that conflict is both necessary and neutral: "an organization with no conflict at all (and I don't know of one) must have either no purpose at all or, at best, a very frivolous purpose. ... On a values scale, conflict is neutral."⁵³ However, Haugk appears to discount the role of an antagonist's intent in his

⁴⁹ Susek, *Firestorm*, 177.

⁵⁰ One example is David Forney, "Five Loaves for Five Thousand: Practices of Abundance for Religious Leaders in Situations of Conflict," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 2/2 (2003): 21-46.

⁵¹ Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2005), 76.

⁵² George W. Bullard, *Every Congregation Needs a Little Conflict* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2008), 10.

⁵³ Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church*, 31.

determination that conflict is neutral. Elsewhere, he describes antagonism as unhealthy conflict and describes antagonists as “malevolent in intent.”⁵⁴

Guy Greenfield observes that “pathological antagonists precipitate conflict that is unhealthy and destructive. It is important to note that not all conflict is of this character. Some conflicts can be both healthy and constructive.”⁵⁵ Ken Sande reasons that “conflict is not necessarily bad In fact, the Bible teaches that *some* differences are natural and beneficial. ... Not all conflict is neutral or beneficial, however.”⁵⁶

Some positive attributes of conflict are noted by James MacGregor Burns in the sphere of international and national politics. He writes that “Western scholarship has shown a quickened interest in the role of conflict in establishing boundaries, channeling hostility, counteracting social ossification, invigorating class and group interests, encouraging innovation, and defining and empowering leadership.” He continues, “Conflict is intrinsically compelling; it galvanizes, prods, motivates people.”⁵⁷ In short, conflict has the potential for shaking people loose from lethargy and pressing them towards greater understanding, purpose and change. Speed Leas argues a similar point at the level of organizations and personal relationships: “... conflict increases consciousness, aliveness, and excitement. It wakes folks up, it keeps them on their toes. It enlivens and challenges.”⁵⁸

In the business context, Heifetz and Linsky state that “most organizations are allergic to conflict, seeing it primarily as a source of danger, which it certainly can be. But conflict is a necessary part of the change process and, if handled properly, can serve as the engine of

⁵⁴ Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church*, 21.

⁵⁵ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 40. In this regard reference is often made to M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*, quoted by Greenfield at pages 49-50.

⁵⁶ Sande, *Peacemaker*, 30.

⁵⁷ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1978, reprint 2010), 37-38.

⁵⁸ Speed B. Leas, *Leadership and Conflict* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982), 109.

progress.”⁵⁹ In a context of social activism, the same observation is made. Quoting Martin Luther King, Elliot Turiel writes: “Conflict and tension, King maintained, can serve positive moral ends: ‘I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive tension that is necessary for growth’”⁶⁰ In the context of servant-leadership, Banks and Ledbetter refer to creative conflict: “Some adherents to servant leadership stress its compatibility with proper accountability, creative rather than disruptive conflict, and tough caring.”⁶¹

So, is conflict good and beneficial, bad and destructive, or simply value-neutral? It seems that it can be any or all of these. Larry Dunn puts it well when he writes: “ ... who we are can be profoundly shaped by conflicts around us, for better or worse. Conflict has the ability to transform our perceptions of self and others, our relationships, our whole social setting. Conflict is a powerful agent for change, able even to transform our identities.”⁶² As such, conflict is not something that needs to be avoided or feared. For the general purposes of this study, perhaps it is sufficient to understand that there is the potential for positive change and growth in a congregational leader experiencing conflict.

B. Leaders and Leadership

This consideration of leaders and leadership will be at or near its overlap with conflict. As such it will generally explore six related topics: (1) definitions of leaders and leadership; (2) the nature of leadership to effect change; (3) the relationship between change

⁵⁹ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, “A Survival Guide for Leaders,” *Harvard Business Review* 80/6 (2002): 69.

⁶⁰ Elliot Turiel, “Resistance and Subversion in Everyday Life,” *Journal of Moral Education* 32/2 (2003): 117.

⁶¹ Robert Banks and Bernice M. Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 109.

⁶² Dunn, “Transforming Identity in Conflict,” 45.

and identity; (4) the relevance and benefits of family systems theory; (5) the relevance and benefits of resilience theory; and, (6) some insights from J. Robert Clinton's *The Making of a Leader*⁶³ regarding leaders being transformed through conflict.

It is acknowledged that virtually every adult, at sometime and in some manner, experiences conflict directed at him or her personally. However, this project is inquiring about conflict experienced by congregational leaders personally from within their congregations. Some of these findings will be particular to leaders; others will be of general application. The initial steps are to define leadership and propose why it attracts conflict.

First, numerous definitions of leadership have been proposed in current literature. The preliminary definition for leadership provided in the previous chapter was "influence, the ability of one person to influence others to follow his or her lead."⁶⁴ In similar terms, J. Robert Clinton defines leadership as "a dynamic process over an extended period of time in which a leader (utilizing leadership resources and by specific leadership behaviors) influences the thought and activities of followers, toward accomplishment of aims – usually mutually beneficial for leaders, followers, and the macro-context of which they are a part."⁶⁵

Some propose an understanding of leadership that is more hierarchical and based upon such things as personality, power or other attributes of the leader. For example, Kets de Vries opines that leadership is "the exercise of power, and the quality of leadership – good, ineffective, or destructive – depends on an individual's ability to exercise power."⁶⁶

⁶³ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988).

⁶⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: A Commitment to Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2007), 27.

⁶⁵ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 245.

⁶⁶ Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries, *Leaders, Fools and Impostors: Essays on the Psychology of Leadership*, rev'd ed. (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2003), 16.

Such leadership bears some similarity to what Ronald Heifetz refers to as “the myth of the lone warrior: the solitary individual whose heroism and brilliance enable him to lead the way. This notion reinforces isolation. From the perspective of the individual who leads with authority, constituents confer power in exchange for being relieved of problems.”⁶⁷ These types of leadership are based on a leader’s abilities, in the first case, to continue the exercise of power, and in the second case, to maintain a social contract. Conflicts related to these kinds of leadership probably arise because of a leader’s actual or perceived abuses or failures.

Others describe leadership from the standpoint of its effects or results. For instance, James Kouzes and Barry Posner describe leadership as mobilizing “others to want to get extraordinary things done in organizations.”⁶⁸ Based on their research they identify “The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership,” one of which is to challenge the process. They report that “Every single personal-best leadership case we collected involved some kind of a challenge. ... Whatever the challenge, all the cases involved a change from the status quo. ... All leaders challenge the process.”⁶⁹ Again, they write that “Leaders ... are fundamentally restless. They don’t like the status quo. They want to make something happen. They want to change the business-as-usual environment.”⁷⁰ Thus, according to Kouzes and Posner, effective leadership is getting extraordinary things done in an organization, and that involves challenging the status quo and effecting change.

⁶⁷ Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1994), 251.

⁶⁸ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), xi, 23-24.

⁶⁹ Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 18 (underlining added).

⁷⁰ Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 168 (underlining added).

James MacGregor Burns argues that “the effectiveness of leaders must be judged ... by actual social change measured by intent and by satisfaction of human needs and expectations”⁷¹

Robert Banks and Bernice Ledbetter, writing from an overt Christian perspective, state that “leadership involves a person, group, or organization who shows the way in an area of life – whether in the short- or the long-term – and in doing so both influences and empowers enough people to bring about change in that area.”⁷²

In the definitions proposed by Kouzes and Posner, Burns, and Banks and Ledbetter, a material component of effective leadership is change to the status quo of those being led. The movement for change is a challenge to the status quo. If the status quo of an individual or an organization is the expression of the identity or ‘self’ of that individual or group, then it is understandable that a challenge or change to the status quo would be a source of conflict with an effective leader. It is also likely that conflict against (i.e., interpersonal), and in (i.e., intrapersonal), a leader occurs in proximity to that leader’s current identity.

Consideration will now be given to three approaches to the relationship of leadership with conflict: Family Systems Theory, Resilience Theory and J. Robert Clinton’s *The Making of a Leader*.

Family Systems Theory and conflict

Family Systems Theory (FST) provides some useful insights into the experience of conflict directed at leaders from within the organizations in which they lead. FST is a model for understanding human relationships based upon the dynamics of the family. Peter Steinke summarizes the theory as describing “the human family as a natural, living,

⁷¹ Burns, *Leadership*, 3; also 425-426 (underlining added).

⁷² Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, 16-17 (underlining added).

multigenerational system in which each person's functioning affects all the other members' functioning."⁷³ Numerous authors have applied this systems approach to the Christian congregation.⁷⁴ As such, a congregation is viewed as an interconnected system which, among other things, is both dynamic and stable. Arthur Boers comments on this concept of stability and change: "All systems need a tension of stability and change. Yet systems mostly resist change. Thus actions often provoke reactions and backlashes. Such backlashes are called 'homeostasis' or 'change back!' reactions. Changes in a system lead to anxiety and may provoke reactions to restore the prior status quo."⁷⁵

As indicated earlier, Edwin Friedman, a family therapist and ordained rabbi, confirms that a system will resist or react against any change of homeostasis or status quo. Thus a leader who is effecting or attempting change within a congregation can be expected to encounter resistance. This resistance or reaction to leaders is often an expression of role conflict – that is, conflict directed at a leader because of his or her role as a "leader," rather than he or she as a person. Friedman refers to this resistance as "sabotage." He states that:

... it is simply not possible to succeed at the effort of leadership through self-differentiation without triggering reactivity. This is a systemic phenomenon and a highly subtle problem that is generally not accounted for in leadership theory. Yet the capacity of a leader to be prepared for, to be aware of, and to learn to skillfully deal with this type of crisis (sabotage) may be the most important aspect of leadership. It is literally the key to the kingdom.⁷⁶

⁷³ Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006), 109.

⁷⁴ Some examples of authors applying Family Systems Theory to the Christian congregation include, Charles Cosgrove and Dennis D. Hatfield, *Church Conflict: The Hidden Systems Behind the Fights* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994); Arthur P. Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1999); James E. Lamkin, "Systems Theory and Congregational Leadership: Leaves from an Alchemist's Journal," *Review and Expositor* 102/3 (2005): 4461-489; Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006).

⁷⁵ Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 28.

⁷⁶ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Seabury, 2007), 246-247.

In response to this sabotage, Friedman advocates that a leader be engaged in the life-long process of non-anxiously self-differentiating from others while remaining connected with them. He describes a leader's self-differentiation as "his or her capacity to be a non-anxious presence, a challenging presence, a well-defined presence, and a paradoxical presence. Differentiation is not about being coercive, manipulative, reactive, pursuing or invasive, but being *rooted* in the leader's own sense of self rather than focused on that of his or her followers."⁷⁷

Resilience Theory and conflict

Resilience theory, or simply, resilience, is a promising area of inquiry for leaders subjected to conflict.

Resilience refers to "a dynamic process of encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity."⁷⁸ This process is applicable in a multitude of situations. Examples include eco-systems devastated by natural disasters; people attacked by terrorists; bodies infected by disease; and, families hit by tragedy. Therefore, it may be applied to a congregational leader experiencing a crisis of conflict.

Resilience "means 'bouncing back' from difficult experiences."⁷⁹ An expanded definition in the context of psychological resilience published by the American Psychological Association is "an interactive product of beliefs, attitudes, approaches,

⁷⁷ Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 230. This concept is also reflected in Friedman's understanding of the function of a leader (p. 151): "to provide that regulation through his or her non-anxious, self-defined presence."

⁷⁸ Suniya S. Luthar, Dante Cicchetti, and Bronwyn Becker, "The Construct of Resilience: A Critical Evaluation and Guidelines for Future Work," *Child Development* 71/3 (2000): 543.

⁷⁹ American Psychological Association, "The Road to Resilience," <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx> (accessed February 24, 2011).

behaviors, and perhaps physiology that help people fare better during adversity and recover more quickly following it.”⁸⁰

In the context of individual humans, there has been some debate whether resilience is an inherent personal trait or a dynamic developmental process. The current consensus appears to indicate that both are present in resilient people. So, for example, in the same way that a successful athlete combines natural talent and careful training, a resilient person combines inherent and developed traits of resilience.⁸¹ Even for people who exhibit relatively low levels of observable intrinsic qualities of resilience (i.e., low inherent ego-resiliency), it is possible acquire and build greater levels of resilience.⁸²

Diane Coutu⁸³ identifies three fundamental characteristics that set resilient people and organizations apart from others. These features are “a staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise.”⁸⁴ Coutu argues that true resilience requires the presence of all three of these factors.

Al Siebert comments that “highly resilient people keep getting better and better because they go through life interacting with the world like curious children.”⁸⁵ This somewhat playful statement appears to echo Coutu’s three elements of being accurately aware of reality (i.e., “world”), applying a worldview that gives meaning to that reality (i.e., implicit in the concept of “interacting”), and having an adaptive capacity to improvise (i.e.,

⁸⁰ American Psychological Association, “Fostering Resilience in Response to Terrorism: For Psychologists Working with Older Adults found at <http://www.apa.org/pi/aging/older-adults.pdf> (accessed March 1, 2011).

⁸¹ Al Siebert, *The Resiliency Advantage: Master Change, Thrive Under Pressure, and Bounce Back from Setbacks* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2005), 10.

⁸² See generally, Luthar, et al., “The Construct of Resilience.”

⁸³ Diane L. Coutu, “How Resilience Works,” *Harvard Business Review* 80/5 (2002): 46-55.

⁸⁴ Coutu, “How Resilience Works,” 48.

⁸⁵ Siebert, *Resiliency Advantage*, 201.

curious children who have a plastic ability to adapt and grow). An additional element may be the support of others – family, friends, counsellors, mentors and confidants, who will listen, encourage and say what needs to be said for the benefit of the person experiencing the crisis.⁸⁶

Exploring resilience in Christian ministers, David Forney observes that overwhelmed leaders may be equipped to better deal with adversity by learning skills such as how to “manage conflict, work as change agents, supervise personnel, handle stewardship campaigns and finances, and organize programs and projects.”⁸⁷ He identifies four further elements for developing resiliency in congregational leaders. First, is the ability to “live into the call to which you have been given”; second, to “live in the dance between facing struggles directly (seeing them as challenges that you can influence), while daily offering your ministry to God,” by which he means focussing on those matters that can be influenced, not on those that cannot; third, “to live with and through the pain of a current situation, knowing that the current situation can be of benefit too by the work of the Holy Spirit.” Regarding the third point, Al Siebert provides numerous accounts of those who have been transformed by painful experiences, including children who survived the Holocaust.⁸⁸ Forney’s fourth point is to develop genuine friendships.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Jerry L. Patterson, George A. Goens and Deane E. Reed, “Joy and Resilience: Strange Bedfellows,” *School Administrator* 65/11 (2008): 28-29.

⁸⁷ David Forney, “A Calm in the Tempest: Developing Resilience in Religious Leaders,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 9/1 (2010): 22.

⁸⁸ Siebert, *Resiliency Advantage*, 171-190.

⁸⁹ Forney, “A Calm in the Tempest,” 24-32.

The Making of a Leader

Specific attention is given to J. Robert Clinton's *The Making of a Leader* for three reasons: (1) this book and its author have directly informed some of the current authors writings about the endurance and transformation of Christian leaders (e.g., Shelley Trebesch, Dave Kraft);⁹⁰ (2) where most other books may address the intersection of leadership and conflict, or conflict and spiritual formation, this book deals with all three issues; and, (3) it provides a transition into the next topic of spiritual formation.

Clinton's approach is a systematized consideration of the development of a Christian leader. He provides a generalized time-line for this development, but allows that it does not necessarily fit everyone. He describes process items as "providential events, people, circumstances, special interventions, inner-life lessons, and/or anything else that God uses" in developing "the leader toward God's appointed ministry level for realized potential."⁹¹ One of these items he calls the "conflict process item" that "affects a leader in terms of spiritual or ministerial formation. Spiritual formation refers to development of the inner-life of a person. Ministerial formation refers to the development of a person in ministry."⁹² He adds that a conflict process item is "to develop the leader in dependence upon God, faith, and insights relating to personal life and ministry."⁹³ Thus, Clinton grapples constructively with the dynamics of conflict in developing the personal and ministerial character of congregational leaders.

⁹⁰ Shelley Trebesch, *Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas, 1997); Dave Kraft, *Leaders Who Last* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

⁹¹ Clinton, *Making of a Leader*, 253.

⁹² Clinton, *Making of a Leader*, 145.

⁹³ Clinton, *Making of a Leader*, 237.

Clinton also introduces the concept of “isolation” which he defines as a “maturity factor item in which a leader is separated from normal ministry, while in the natural context in which ministry has been occurring for an extended time, and thus experiences God in a new and deeper way.”⁹⁴ An instance of isolation may be a life crisis, such as a situation of personal conflict. It is during these times that a leader should be drawn deeper into the presence of God where his or her character can experience deep change.

Shelley Trebesch explores Clinton’s idea of isolation in *Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader*.⁹⁵ She asserts that conflict is a form of involuntary isolation. It is during these experiences of isolation that, she says, a leader is primarily being stripped of his or her ministry identity and, in its place, is being led to discover who God has created them to be: “Having experienced the stripping and wrestling that reveals who God has created them to be, broken leaders can now embrace their true identity wholeheartedly and enter ministry knowing their giftedness as well as their weakness.”⁹⁶

Having briefly examined some aspects at the intersection of conflict and leadership, this review will now consider some relevant aspects of spiritual formation.

C. Spiritual Formation

This section will survey some literature from the perspective of spiritual formation as it relates to leaders who have experienced conflict. To some extent, the earlier review of Clinton’s *The Making of a Leader* and Trebesch’s *Isolation* leads into, and partially

⁹⁴ Clinton, *Making of a Leader*, 244-245.

⁹⁵ Shelley Trebesch, *Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas, 1997). J. Robert Clinton writes the forward to this book and acknowledges having been her mentor for five years.

⁹⁶ Trebesch, *Isolation*, 50.

addresses, the issue of spiritual formation as a desired result of a leader's experience of conflict.

Numerous helpful descriptions of spiritual formation exist. The following are only a sampling. M. Robert Mulholland writes that "Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others."⁹⁷ Mel Lawrenz's description is "the progressive patterning of a person's inner and outer life according to the image of Christ through intentional means of spiritual growth."⁹⁸ Ken Boa offers that it is the "grace-driven developmental process in which the soul grows in conformity to the image of Christ."⁹⁹ One of the definitions provided by Dallas Willard is "the process whereby the inmost being of the individual takes on the quality or character of Jesus himself."¹⁰⁰ In a definition that invites a comparison between spiritual formation and discipleship, Michael J. Wilkins states that "Discipleship and discipling mean living a fully human life in the world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image."¹⁰¹ All of these definitions have three common elements: an individual; a transforming process; and the objective of being like Jesus Christ.¹⁰² Drawing on the earlier discussion of a person's identity, it is suggested that spiritual formation is essentially the process of transforming one's current identity of 'self' to an identity that is more like Jesus Christ.

⁹⁷ M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, rev'd ed. (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2000), 25. This definition appeared in expanded form in Mulholland's earlier book, *Invitation to a Journey: a Roadmap for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 15-44.

⁹⁸ Mel Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 15.

⁹⁹ Ken Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 515.

¹⁰⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2006), 54.

¹⁰¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 42.

¹⁰² The phrase "being like Jesus" requires some qualification to ensure that it is not misunderstood or misused. Those who have been redeemed by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ will become like Jesus in his essential holy humanity. This does not mean that humans acquire his essential deity or god-hood. This will be dealt with further in chapter 3.

As stated in chapter one, the definition of spiritual formation proposed for this project is: “the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰³ This definition is preferred because it specifically incorporates the Trinity and the community of faith (i.e., a congregation) as necessary participants in spiritual formation.

Some of the literature which has been surveyed is helpful in supporting the general principle that positive effects can result from conflict. At the level of a society or organization, Elliot Turiel concludes that resistance or conflict is present in everyday life in most cultural settings, and that it is integral to the process of transforming aspects of social systems deemed to be unfair to groups of people within that system (e.g., racial segregation in the southern United States during the 1960s).¹⁰⁴ Heifetz and Linsky view organizational “progress” as a positive outcome of properly handled conflict.¹⁰⁵

Regarding individual leaders, Osterhaus, Jurkowski and Hahn use the terms “transforming change” and “adaptive change,” by which they mean “deep change on the level of values, beliefs, and behavior.”¹⁰⁶ Rediger refers to a transformation principle which, he says, “teaches us that we all need transformation of various kinds in order to be forgiven, healed, and open to spiritual growth.”¹⁰⁷ Bennis and Thomas conclude that a crucible-like

¹⁰³ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

¹⁰⁴ Turiel, “Resistance and Subversion in Everyday Life,” 115-130.

¹⁰⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, “Survival Guide for Leaders,” 69.

¹⁰⁶ James P. Osterhaus, Joseph M. Jurkowski and Todd A. Hahn, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict: By Understanding Your Red and Blue Zones* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 81, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Rediger, *Clergy Killers*, 175-176.

experience, such as conflict, is “a transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or an altered sense of identity.”¹⁰⁸

Although many authors use the language of transformation, and recognize that beneficial change, growth, progress and altered identity can result from conflict, they come short of specifically identifying such personal transformation as the process of being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. However, some writers expressly refer to the connection between conflict and spiritual formation. Van Yperen refers to the necessity of conflict in which “God holds us – and molds us – in His hands”¹⁰⁹; Sande states that “Conflict is one of the many tools that God will use to help you develop a more Christ-like character.”¹¹⁰

Most of the popular books on spiritual formation from North American evangelical sources considered for this survey do not refer to conflict. This omission would seem to indicate that, for the most part, these authors do not believe that conflict is a material or a positive consideration for spiritual formation.

In addition to the writings of Clinton and Trebesch, two books on spiritual formation do briefly consider conflict or crisis as significant: Wilhoit’s *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* and Lawrenz’s *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*. Lawrenz opines that for the majority of Christians the most spiritually formative influence in their lives is crisis.¹¹¹ He writes that “when *crisis* breaks us down, God’s grace is there to put the pieces

¹⁰⁸ Bennis and Thomas, “Crucibles for Leadership,” 40.

¹⁰⁹ Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 105.

¹¹⁰ Sande, *Peacemaker*, 37.

¹¹¹ Lawrenz, *Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*, 41.

back together in brand new forms. And God puts the church there as the instrument of soul-shaping.”¹¹²

Wilhoit is more specific in not only considering crisis generally, but the crisis of conflict specifically. He regards conflict, together with suffering, persecution and the dark night of the soul, as involuntary or situational disciplines that “we must never forget.”¹¹³ He proposes a corollary of spiritual formation that “Conflict has a unique way of forming us. In conflict our natural patterns of defensiveness arise, and in this vulnerable place we can experience much growth as we learn that Jesus’ teachings are so sensible.”¹¹⁴ One of these teachings of Jesus to which he refers is “the echo of forgiveness” – to intentionally forgive others as Christ has forgiven (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). “Forgiving is a powerful witness to our personal and corporate ability to recognize the forgiveness that we have received in such a way as to be able to use it: to multiply it by extending it to others.”¹¹⁵

In drawing together the elements of conflict, congregational leadership and spiritual formation, it may be helpful to rephrase Christian spiritual formation in terms of a person’s identity. As conflict touches the identity of the leader, the potential exists for the leader’s identity to be changed into something more Christ-like. On this basis, Wilhoit’s definition may be adapted to read: Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of my identity (i.e., who I am, or perceive myself to be) being changed as I am growing in my relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹¹² Lawrenz, *Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*, 46.

¹¹³ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 93.

¹¹⁴ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 174.

¹¹⁵ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 200.

In summary, conflict is recognized as one of the involuntary crises that God uses in the spiritual formation of a congregational leader as he or she is engaged in the divine process of becoming more like Jesus Christ.

D. Factors Contributing to Spiritual Formation

Having examined some of the current literature at or near the intersection of conflict, leadership and spiritual formation, this survey now considers what authors claim as critical factors that contribute to spiritual formation in leaders experiencing conflict.

After a careful review of current literature, eight general categories of factors have been identified. These eight categories are an existing intimacy with God; a functioning biblical theology; training for wholesome and effective behaviour; practising spiritual disciplines; being oriented to, or in, one's call; attending to emotional or mental health; attending to physical or bodily health; and, relating to others.

Proposing these classes of factors may give the impression of unduly systematizing and distinguishing matters that are actually fluid, organic and interrelated. The intention is to provide some structure that better enables perspective. It is acknowledged that none of these factors stands alone; they are all interconnected in some way. It is also acknowledged that these categories have a large degree of transferability to followers of Jesus who may not consider themselves to be leaders.

Some of the authors use neither the language nor the concept of spiritual formation. Nevertheless, attention has been given to that literature because it is deemed that it has something useful to say to this project. Material has been included from the social sciences and psychology on topics such as resilience and family systems theories. In addition, authors

who have written from a Christian perspective on leadership and conflict may not have expressly addressed the issue of spiritual formation. However, various metaphors may have been used by some of these authors to communicate recommendations for congregational leaders who have experienced, or are experiencing, conflict directed at them personally. These metaphors include the language of hostile environments (e.g., “survival skills,” “street smarts” and “pastoral fitness”);¹¹⁶ electricity (e.g., “emotional and spiritual circuit breakers to protect when highly charged criticism is directed at me”);¹¹⁷ medicine (e.g., wounded, recovery and healing);¹¹⁸ and, music (e.g., “tuning our own harpstrings”).¹¹⁹ Although this language does not expressly refer to spiritual formation, the messages are consistent with spiritual formation or, at least, the endurance and survival of conflict, and will be used for this purpose to the extent possible.

What follows is a brief explanation of each of the eight categories identified in this review.

First, is a congregational leader’s existing intimacy with God. This is not “depersonalized ... information about God” but “the *living* of everything we know about God: life, life, and more life.”¹²⁰ Marshall Shelley expresses this important feature of a Christian leader’s sense of purpose when he writes that “Christ, not ministry, must be my life”¹²¹ and relates Jonathan Edwards’ resolutions with approval: “Resolved: that all men

¹¹⁶ Rediger, *Clergy Killers*, 133-140.

¹¹⁷ Ben Patterson, “Wiring Yourself for Lightning,” in *Leading Your Church Through Conflict and Reconciliation*, ed. Marshall Shelley (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1996), 21-22.

¹¹⁸ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 169-226.

¹¹⁹ Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 121-133.

¹²⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2005), 1.

¹²¹ Marshall Shelley and John Cionca, “Confidence Amid Criticism,” in *Mastering Conflict and Controversy*, ed. Edward G. Dobson, Speed B. Leas and Marshall Shelley (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1992), 52.

should live for the glory of God. Resolved second: that whether others do or not, I will.”¹²²

Ken Sande opines as a general principle that conflict is an opportunity to glorify God.¹²³

This factor involves knowing God in growing intimacy and experience. In the event that a leader has loosened his or her grip on this central element, Crowell relates a specific incident of conflict in his life that was “used as a shock treatment to direct my attention to him.”¹²⁴

Second, is the matter of a leader’s functioning biblical theology. Such core beliefs inform and shape a person’s worldview – that “grid through which humans, both individually and in social groupings, perceive all reality.”¹²⁵ A worldview provides an understanding and interpretation of the world and its events. For the evangelical congregational leader, worldview, core beliefs, biblical theology and doctrine are, or should be, consistent if not synonymous with each other. In turn this affects how a leader views and interprets virtually everything including leadership, relationships with others, and conflict.

According to Diane Coutu, two fundamental characteristics of resilient people are “a staunch acceptance of reality” and “a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful.”¹²⁶ Al Siebert states that resilient people are “those with the best comprehension of what is occurring in the world around them.”¹²⁷ These attributes are consistent with a robust Christian worldview. Goheen and Bartholomew, arguing for a

¹²² Shelley and Cionca, “Confidence Amid Criticism,” 48.

¹²³ Sande, *Peacemaker*, 31-34.

¹²⁴ Rodney Crowell, “Spiritual Survival for a Forced Exit,” *Leadership* 10/1 (1989): 29.

¹²⁵ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 32. Typically, the term “mindset” is used for an individual and “worldview” for a community, society or culture. For our purposes we will use worldview as inclusive of an individual leader’s mindset although a mindset and worldview may conflict at various points. See for example, Brian J. Walsh, “Worldview,” in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*, ed. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 1135-1138; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 100ff.

¹²⁶ Coutu, “How Resilience Works,” 48.

¹²⁷ Siebert, *Resiliency Advantage*, 93.

Christian worldview, state that “Worldview is concerned to express our deepest religious beliefs about the world arising from the gospel and the biblical drama. We express our foundational assumptions about the world that flows from a living relationship with Christ.”¹²⁸

If a leader has dysfunctional core beliefs then it can be expected that such a leader will interpret and behave in ways that are dysfunctional. At least five areas of theology related to conflict were specifically identified in the literature surveyed: God’s sovereignty, human depravity, spiritual warfare, suffering, and forgiveness.

In the matter of God’s sovereignty Ken Sande, for example, identifies a biblical understanding of God’s love and power as the basis for trusting him. Sande concludes that “if you believe that God is sovereign and that he will never allow anything into your life unless it can be used for good, you will see conflicts not as *accidents* but as *opportunities*.”¹²⁹

A number of authors speak of the need for a healthy and biblical view of human depravity¹³⁰ that will orient a person in distinguishing between good and evil, and in comprehending occurrences of intentional and ‘evil’ attacks.

Crowell¹³¹ observes that events such as a leader’s resignation are times of spiritual warfare. A sound biblical understanding of spiritual warfare will provide wholesome insights into the dynamic and purpose of some conflict.

¹²⁸ Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 20.

¹²⁹ Sande, *Peacemaker*, 59-73.

¹³⁰ Shelley and Cionca, “Confidence Amid Criticism,” 52; Patterson, “Wiring Yourself for Lightning,” 39-40.

¹³¹ Crowell, “Spiritual Survival for a Forced Exit,” 30.

On the matter of suffering, Ajith Fernando, a Sri Lankan Christian, writes as an outsider to the western Church, and as such to the Canadian evangelical context. He states that:

... one of the most serious theological blind spots in the western church is a defective understanding of suffering. There seems to be a lot of reflection on how to avoid suffering and on what to do when hurt. We have a lot of teaching about escape from and therapy for suffering, but there is inadequate teaching about the theology of suffering. Christians are not taught why they should expect suffering as followers of Christ and why suffering is so important for healthy growth as a Christian. So suffering is viewed only in a negative way.

The “good life,” comfort, convenience, and a painless life have become necessities that people view as basic rights. If they do not have these, they think something has gone wrong. So when something like inconvenience or pain comes, they do all they can to avoid or lessen it. One of the results of this attitude is a severe restriction of spiritual growth, for God intends us to grow through trials.¹³²

Although this is a general statement, it may be applied to congregational leaders experiencing conflict. It is argued that a more biblical and healthy theology of suffering will equip leaders to perceive conflict in different, and more wholesome ways.

The theology of forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, two divergent views on forgiveness are expressed in the literature. On one hand is a forgiveness that is the process for reconciliation of a broken relationship modeled upon God’s forgiveness (e.g., Poirier, Newberger, Sande),¹³³ and on the other are therapeutic-type approaches to forgiveness that are often unilateral and appear to be more about the offended or hurting individual (e.g., Greenfield).¹³⁴ Some authors appear to

¹³² Ajith Fernando, *The Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in Your Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 51-52.

¹³³ Poirier, *Peacemaking Pastor*, 133-158; Newberger, *Hope in the Face of Conflict*, 234-251; Sande, *Peacemaker*, 204-224.

¹³⁴ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 186-193.

vacillate between these two positions (e.g., Peters, Shelley).¹³⁵ It is proposed that a biblical and functional theology of forgiveness will be established upon the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ.

These brief insights concerning the impact of a leader's theology should be sufficient to cause leaders to examine and, where necessary, adjust their core beliefs to a more thoroughly biblical theology and worldview regarding conflict. Greenfield captures the essence of this category when he states that: "Your core beliefs determine how you interpret life's experiences, situations, and relationships. You have little or no control over life's painful experiences, but you do have control over the way you interpret and respond to them."¹³⁶ He argues that dysfunctional behaviours and feelings indicate dysfunctional core beliefs, doctrine, theology or worldviews that, in turn, need to be adjusted to functional core beliefs consistent with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Third, is training and education in areas that equip a leader to respond to and deal with conflict in a wholesome and competent manner. This is distinct from the preceding category of core beliefs, doctrine and theology, but flows from those core beliefs in an improved ability to express and practise them in a functional manner. To some extent, this includes the discipline of practical theology which "extends systematic theology into the life and praxis of the Christian community."¹³⁷

One example of additional education is training in the ability to identify and respond appropriately to conflict. Greenfield observes that most seminaries do not prepare their

¹³⁵ Dave Peters, *Surviving Church Conflict* (Scottsdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1997), 121; Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons*, 140-146.

¹³⁶ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 212.

¹³⁷ Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 23.

students to deal with antagonists and conflict.¹³⁸ The leading recommendation of the study by Hoge and Wenger is that seminaries should do more to prepare ministers and other leaders for the practical aspects of ministry, including conflict.¹³⁹ Ken Sande states that the “average pastor has not had five minutes of practical peacemaking instruction. It’s all theoretical.”¹⁴⁰ Some awareness of, and ability to apply, theories and techniques of conflict resolution, conflict management and conflict transformation, as well as dealing with difficult people, are necessary skills for leaders in congregations, even if it simply equips a leader to identify unhealthy conflict and obtain appropriate help and resources. This is true not only of interpersonal conflict, but also of intrapersonal conflict. An understanding of conflict theory will provide context and perspective, as well as contribute to wholesome and competent responses.

It is also beneficial for leaders to gain some personal awareness of how and why they respond to conflict. In this regard, Heifetz employs the useful metaphor of standing on a balcony looking over a dance floor. From this psychological vantage point leaders are able to observe not only others, but also themselves. One example Heifetz provides is a leader learning to understand and compensate for how he or she processes and distorts what is heard – the leader “needs to become sufficiently acquainted with that reflex that he can listen and respond flexibly, according to the needs of the situation. Compensation requires the inner discipline to step back and test the accuracy of one’s own perceptions and the appropriateness of one’s reaction.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 81.

¹³⁹ Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition*, 202-204.

¹⁴⁰ Ken Sande, “Preemptive Peace,” *Leadership*

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2011/winter/preemptivepeace.html> (accessed January 26, 2011).

¹⁴¹ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 271.

One author's basic recommendation is to take a research stance observing that "Simply asking questions helps everyone to get away from emotionality and reactivity. The purpose is to move us away from our instinctual and unthinking emotive reactions."¹⁴² Some skills may require intensive training, while others may be easily acquired.

Fourth, is the category of spiritual disciplines and their practice. This is an extension of the preceding points. A number of objectives are included in this category including the re-establishing and strengthening of a leader's relationship with God, together with gaining a healthy perspective of a conflict situation in relationship to God's sovereign purposes.¹⁴³

Donald Whitney describes the spiritual disciplines as "those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth."¹⁴⁴ Robert Mulholland views the spiritual disciplines as "the act of releasing ourselves in a consistent manner to God, opening those doors in a regular way to allow God's transforming work in our lives."¹⁴⁵ Wilhoit describes the purpose of these disciplines as "aimed at heart transformation and the growth of inner beauty" and allowing us "to place ourselves before God in order to receive his grace and be transformed by it."¹⁴⁶ Spiritual disciplines include inward disciplines (e.g., meditation, prayer, fasting, study), outward disciplines (e.g., simplicity, solitude, submission, service), and corporate disciplines (e.g., confession, worship, guidance, celebration).¹⁴⁷

In the review of texts on conflict and leadership, only a few specifically advise the practice of spiritual disciplines as part of a leader's response to conflict. For some of these

¹⁴² Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 129.

¹⁴³ Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons*, 139-140.

¹⁴⁴ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 15.

¹⁴⁵ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 38.

¹⁴⁶ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 93.

¹⁴⁷ This list of spiritual disciplines is taken from Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978).

authors it would appear that practising spiritual disciplines is viewed more as a technique for survival and recovery than as an intentional way of experiencing God's transforming grace in a crisis such as conflict. Two writers who appear to have this limited view of spiritual disciplines are Lloyd Rediger and Ben Patterson. Rediger refers to six disciplines (i.e., prayer, stewardship, caring, meditation, confession-forgiveness, worship) in five pages as part of a chapter entitled "pastoral fitness,"¹⁴⁸ and Ben Patterson lists prayer journaling and Scripture memorizing among seven "emotional and spiritual circuit breakers to protect when highly charged criticism is directed at me."¹⁴⁹

Some authors advocate greater intentionality in the practice of spiritual disciplines as a way of growing in one's relationship with God, rather than simply seeing the disciplines as a "circuit breaker" or survival technique. Shelley Trebesch encourages leaders in isolation to remember experiences of God's presence in their ministry in company with disciplines such as immersing oneself in Scripture, listening for the voice of God, meditation, and "centering prayer."¹⁵⁰ Arthur Boers addresses an important and practical aspect of spiritual disciplines when he comments that "the problem of difficult behavior is a spiritual issue and calls us to care for our own relationship with God. During a devastating church conflict, I relearned something I had always claimed to know: I came to a deep realization of God's love."¹⁵¹

One consideration in any situation of conflict is self-examination and, where necessary, appropriate repentance, confession and forgiveness. This is an illustration of some of these categories overlapping or being interrelated. In this case, self-examination

¹⁴⁸ Rediger, *Clergy Killers*, 176-180.

¹⁴⁹ Patterson, "Wiring Yourself for Lightning," 21.

¹⁵⁰ Trebesch, *Isolation*, 58-64.

¹⁵¹ Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 131.

includes the act of discernment “between accurate criticism and unfair blame.”¹⁵² As such this will involve not only a leader’s practise of biblical theology and spiritual disciplines, but also engagement in the realm of emotional and mental life for himself or herself, or with his or her congregation, a confessor-confidant, or perhaps others.

Fifth, is orienting oneself to, or in, one’s call, which is a leader’s intentional reflection upon his or her purpose and ministry. Heifetz points to the distinction between a defined purpose and a sense of purpose – both are necessary for effective leadership, but they are not the same. He states that “Defined purposes are the single most important source of orientation in doing both technical and adaptive work, like a ship’s compass heading at sea. But even more precious than any defined purpose is a sense of purpose that can enable one to step back and review, perhaps with doubt, perhaps with delight, the orienting values embedded in a particular mission.”¹⁵³ Purpose is a significant component of a wholesome and realistic grid for interpreting experiences of life, including a crisis of conflict, contributing to personal resilience.

A leader’s defined purpose, ministry and location may continue the same or it may change due to any number of factors including experience and maturity, gifting, and life-circumstances. Guy Greenfield relates his own experience of “listening again to his call to ministry” and discerning that it had been “redirected, not canceled.” He advises that a leader questioning or doubting his or her “calling” should “be creative in allowing God to redirect your ministry.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Crowell, “Spiritual Survival for a Forced Exit,” 28.

¹⁵³ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 274.

¹⁵⁴ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 199-201.

A cautionary note is sounded at this point regarding the use of the term “calling” in Christian and biblical contexts. The meaning of calling is often reduced to an occupation, career or profession. R. Paul Stevens provides a needed corrective in this regard:

... calling means that our lives are so lived as a summons of Christ that the expression of our personalities and the exercise of our spiritual gifts and natural talents are given direction and power precisely because they are not done for themselves, our families, our businesses or even humankind but for the Lord, who will hold us accountable for them. A calling in Scripture is neither limited to nor equated with work. Moreover, a calling is to someone, not to something or somewhere.¹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, conflict may be an event that causes the leader to reflect upon his or her purpose, ministry and location, and to make any adjustments that may be necessary.

Sixth, is the area of a leader’s emotions, attitudes and mental health. One realistic piece of advice for leaders who have experienced conflict directed at them from within a congregation is to “expect uncomfortable emotions.”¹⁵⁶ Such leaders often have responses that include anger, betrayal, bitterness, shock, defensiveness, being overwhelmed, apathy and depression.¹⁵⁷ Susek states that these are “normal eruptions when the soul is overpowered by unfairness, injustice, and disappointment ... betrayal and rejection.”¹⁵⁸ This internal situation identifies something of the experience of intrapersonal conflict.

Some of the literature generally counsels the leader to be honest and hopeful. Trebesch proposes that being honest includes “getting in touch with your feelings” by which she means expressing your feelings, asking God the tough questions, and being open to a close friend or confessor-confidant. She continues that being hopeful includes keeping

¹⁵⁵ R. Paul Stevens, “Calling/Vocation,” in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*, ed. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 97.

¹⁵⁶ Crowell, “Spiritual Survival for a Forced Exit,” 28.

¹⁵⁷ CTI Report, 15. The CTI Report refers to the document prepared by *Christianity Today International* entitled “Managing Church Conflict: The Source, Pastors Reactions and Its Effects,”

<http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/downloads/churchresearch/cr12.html> (accessed June 22, 2010).

¹⁵⁸ Susek, *Firestorm*, 202. See generally, chapter 20: “Self-Help for Badly Burned Pastors,” 202-211.

perspective and understanding the process of isolation and knowing that it does come to an end.¹⁵⁹ Even in situations where there is no resolution, Shelley simply acknowledges that time can bring healing,¹⁶⁰ which includes rest from intensive mental activity and dealing with potentially destructive emotions such as anger.

A number of the authors surveyed identify self-awareness as a key to emotional and mental well-being. This self-awareness is also an element of personal or psychological resilience. Daniel Goleman in *Emotional Intelligence* states: “People with greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives, have a surer sense of how they really feel about personal decisions” He adds that “Handling feelings so they are appropriate is an ability that builds on self-awareness. ... those who excel in it can bounce back more quickly from life’s setbacks and upsets.”¹⁶¹ Boers refers to Daniel Goleman with approval and observes that “Awareness of emotions is a first step to gaining control over impulses. Such awareness can put us – and not our emotions or our reactivity – in charge.”¹⁶² Boers recommends the Ignatian consciousness *examen* as one means of such self-awareness.¹⁶³

Again, referring to Trebesch and others, the active presence of a discerning and competent friend, counsellor, therapist or confessor-confidant is useful, if not necessary, in addressing the important issues of emotions, attitudes and mental health.

Seventh, is the category of wholesome attention to the leader’s physical condition.

Often people hold, consciously or unconsciously, a dualistic or gnostic-type dichotomy that

¹⁵⁹ Trebesch, *Isolation*, 55-66.

¹⁶⁰ Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons*, 136.

¹⁶¹ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1995), 43

¹⁶² Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 125.

¹⁶³ An accessible treatment of the consciousness *examen* by a modern-day North American Roman Catholic is Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2006), and by a modern-day North American Protestant is James L. Wakefield, *Sacred Listening: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006).

separates and elevates the spirit or non-physical component of our humanity against the physical body. This can have the result of neglecting, or even abusing, the body. A number of authors address the importance of the proper care of our physical bodies in the context of surviving conflict.

A leader experiencing conflict should avoid practices that abuse the body such as exhaustion, bad diet, drugs and alcohol, and being overweight. Stress (i.e., distress or unhealthy stress) is frequently inherent in leadership and situations of conflict. “When stress is overwhelming or constant, it can cause mental and emotional difficulties as well as heart disease, obesity, asthma, ulcers, and allergies.”¹⁶⁴

Authors recommend a healthy physical regime of exercise, a nutritious diet and sufficient rest. Bal, Campbell and McDowell-Larsen also advise that a person should pay attention to the body’s responses to stress including increased heart rate, rise in body temperature (i.e., getting ‘hot’), clenched jaw, and headaches. In addition to knowing your particular indicators to stress they recommend rituals such as walking, deep-breathing or stretching every ninety minutes or so; getting away physically and mentally from the stressful environment by setting boundaries between work and home, or listening to music; building a support system; exercising regularly; proper diet (e.g., more whole grains, fruits and vegetables and fewer refined or processed foods).¹⁶⁵

Rediger and others observe the interconnections and interdependence of body and spirit: “fitness is a subheading under wholeness, which is the union of body, mind, and spirit

¹⁶⁴ Vidula Bal, Michael Campbell, and Sharon McDowell-Larsen, “In Focus/Managing Stress: Surviving the Pressure Cooker,” *Leadership in Action* 28/2 (2008): 20.

¹⁶⁵ Bal, et al., “In Focus/Managing Stress,” 19-20.

in the fulfillment of God's purposes."¹⁶⁶ The health and fitness of the body can have a direct impact upon a leader's effectiveness and response to conflict.

Eighth, is the important area of a leader's relationships with others. A leader's relationship with God has been addressed in preceding factors. A number of different human relationships could be considered in this category including: (1) the leader's attitude and actions towards those who are antagonists in the conflict; (2) those within the congregation who are not antagonists; (3) those not within the congregation who may be affected in some way by the conflict; (4) the leader's spouse, family and close friends who may or may not be within the congregation; and, (5) a confessor-confidant. It is the last of these relationships that will be the focus of this section; however, a few comments will also be made regarding the other relationships.

First, the congregational leader's stance toward an antagonist is important from several perspectives. Among other things, leaders manifest something of their relationship with God and the value of the other person by the manner in which they treat their antagonists. In turn, a leader's stance in a conflict will be discerned by, and have an effect upon, others. Boers observes that "Leaders are on the front line, and our responses are crucial."¹⁶⁷ Leaders need to respond prayerfully and intelligently to conflict. This includes listening with respect to those who oppose the leader as something useful may be discovered through this process.¹⁶⁸ Perhaps application of the spiritual discipline of confession is

¹⁶⁶ Rediger, *Clergy Killers*, 166.

¹⁶⁷ Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 93.

¹⁶⁸ Aubry Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 127-129. In cases where the leader has sinned, or has otherwise acted inappropriately, see: Edward G. Dobson, "Restoring a Fallen Colleague," in *Mastering Conflict & Controversy*, ed. Edward G. Dobson, Speed B. Leas, Marshall Shelley (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1992), 121-146; Blaine Allen, *When People Throw Stones: A Leader's Guide to Fielding Personal Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2005), 37.

required by the leader (viz., Matthew 5:23-24), or recourse to the provisions of Matthew 18:15-20 are indicated. Caution should be exercised in situations where it is discerned that opposition against a leader is for wrong or destructive purposes. A number of resources exist for identifying, responding to, and dealing with antagonists including Boers, Haugk, Rediger and Shelley.¹⁶⁹ A leader's competence in this area is enhanced not only by self-awareness and spiritual maturity, but also by acquiring some education and training as earlier mentioned. This training may include developing an ability to identify and deal with antagonists who may be seriously disordered mentally or spiritually.

Second, leaders need to continue caring for the rest of the congregation. When leaders are not directly engaged as a party to conflict, it can be an opportunity for wisely educating the congregation about conflict and how to deal with it. Such education should include moving congregants from a "posture of being spectators who observe the conflict to being bystanders who fight for fair fighting by all parties."¹⁷⁰ However, in situations where a leader is one of the participants in a conflict, he or she will probably not be the right person to provide this teaching, or to implement this change of posture. In those situations, leaders should know what needs to be done and who to call upon to take the appropriate measures.

Third, a leader should also be aware that there are those who are not within the congregation who are affected, directly or indirectly, by the conflict. For instance, people who are not yet Christians but become aware of conflict may be watching how Christians (particularly leaders) deal with conflict.

¹⁶⁹ See generally, Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*; Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church*; Rediger, *Clergy Killers*; Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons*.

¹⁷⁰ Hugh F. Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 110-111; see also, Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 118.

Fourth, a leader's spouse and family are directly impacted when the leader experiences conflict from within the congregation. Proper support and loving care for the family are vitally important to the leader and to his or her family members.

Fifth, is the availability of a competent confessor-confidant to come alongside the leader during and after conflict. Guy Greenfield states that "Entirely too many wounded ministers are attempting to handle their pain alone."¹⁷¹ A leader experiencing conflict may not know who to turn to, or even want to turn to another person. Ronald Heifetz puts it another way: "The lone-warrior model of leadership is heroic suicide. Each of us has blind spots that require the vision of others. Each of us has passions that need to be contained by others. Anyone can lose the capacity to get on the balcony, particularly when the pressures mount. Every person who leads needs help in distinguishing self from role and identifying the underlying issues that generate attack."¹⁷²

The term "confessor-confidant" is taken from Kenneth Haugk's *Antagonists in the Church*,¹⁷³ but similar terms and advice are given in a number of other books surveyed. Some writers advocate a more formal group such as a pastoral-support committee or a pastors' study group,¹⁷⁴ while others recommend professional counsellors or therapists,¹⁷⁵ all of whom may play some part in the protection, support, recovery and growth of a leader who experiences conflict.

For Heifetz a confidant is one type of partner. He writes that:

The confidant is the person to whom one can cry out and complain. A confidant can provide a holding environment for someone who is busy holding everybody else.

¹⁷¹ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 220.

¹⁷² Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 268.

¹⁷³ Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church*, 114-120.

¹⁷⁴ Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 128; Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 183-184.

¹⁷⁵ Greenfield, *Wounded Minister*, 182-183

People attempting to lead need partners who can put them back together again at the end of the day. These partners, often friends, spouses, lovers, or close colleagues, provide perspective. They help one climb back up to the balcony to understand what has happened. They help ask questions like “What’s going on here? What’s the distress about? What can be learned from the mistake? What are the options for corrective action?”¹⁷⁶

In Haugk’s words, “A confessor-confidant is someone with whom you can share feelings, thoughts, and strategies for coping with an antagonistic situation. You can risk trusting a confessor-confidant, revealing to him or her your true feelings. He or she will respect confidences, display a measure of objectivity, listen intently, and offer responsible, timely advice.”¹⁷⁷ It is often beneficial if this person is outside the congregation as he or she will be separated from the dynamic of congregational life and tensions, and such qualities as independence and confidentiality will be more clearly demonstrated and sustained. Other attributes of a beneficial confessor-confidant typically include a degree of discernment and maturity, and a commitment to be engaged in the process of maturing the leader in conflict. Susek refers to the New Testament couple, Priscilla and Aquilla, as an illustration of confessor-confidants: “they had something to say, and second, they said it with the right spirit.”¹⁷⁸ Trebesch uses the term mentor, and suggests such a person not only be mature but also have specific experience of the kind the leader is grappling with: “a mentor who has been through isolation [i.e., specifically conflict directed at the leader from within the congregation] will provide you with a spiritual guide to help give perspective and will provide a friend to empathize with the darkness that one experiences during isolation.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 268-269.

¹⁷⁷ Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church*, 114

¹⁷⁸ Susek, *Firestorm*, 192-194.

¹⁷⁹ Trebesch, *Isolation*, 61, parenthetic note added.

E. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed some of the extensive current literature at or near the intersection of conflict, leadership and spiritual transformation. In a review of this nature it is inevitable that some aspects related to the issues will be neglected or only touched upon lightly.

It has emerged that conflict typically occurs in the proximity of a person's or group's identity. In essence, identity is often expressed by the status quo of a person or group such as a congregation. Therefore, one common cause of conflict directed at a congregational leader is explained by a leader's attempt to change, fail to comply with, or otherwise challenge the status quo of a person or a congregation.

It is further concluded that conflict has the potential for positive and developmental change in a leader. The words of Larry Dunn bear repeating: "... who we are can be profoundly shaped by conflicts around us, for better or worse. Conflict has the ability to transform our perceptions of self and others, our relationships, our whole social setting. Conflict is a powerful agent for change, able even to transform our identities."¹⁸⁰

As spiritual formation is the process of transforming a person to becoming more like Jesus Christ, the changing of that person's identity becomes essential. Conflict is one means employed in that process of identity transformation.

Eight specific factors were identified from the literature as practical and necessary elements of leaders responding to, and processing, conflict with a view to participating in the process of their own spiritual transformation. This study will consider how these eight

¹⁸⁰ Dunn, "Transforming Identity in Conflict," 45.

factors may contribute to a leader's spiritual formation. The next chapter will more fully examine these conclusions in the context of biblical theology.

Chapter 3 - Biblical and Theological Foundations

*The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the LORD tests hearts.*¹⁸¹

This chapter will cover a large theological landscape. It will only be able to do so briefly and conceptually in an attempt to map out the biblical foundations relevant to this project; namely, the nature and purpose of conflict in the lives of congregational leaders that contributes to their spiritual formation.

In the preceding chapter, one conclusion was that a person or group experiences conflict at or near a point where the identity of that person or group is challenged or confronted. Another conclusion was that identity can be changed by conflict – change that includes the possibility of spiritual formation. Thus identity is not only directly related to conflict, but also central to spiritual formation. This chapter will consider the theological foundations for these conclusions through an examination of the biblical text.

In broad terms, this chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section will discuss the issue of spiritual formation in terms of personal identity. To accomplish this, it will trace the relationship of human identity and conflict from the text of Genesis 1-2 where it is revealed that humans were created “in the image of God”; to the events of Genesis 3 when that image was corrupted; to the revelation of the uncorrupted “image of God” in Jesus Christ; to God’s process of spiritual formation by which he is transforming a new humanity into the image of his Son.

¹⁸¹ Proverbs 17:3. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001). The literal nature of this translation assists in identifying some of the linguistic and literary features of the biblical text.

The second section will build upon the first, and will illustrate the process of spiritual formation in congregational leaders who experienced conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations. For this purpose, four biblical characters have been chosen: Moses, David, Jeremiah and Paul. It is believed that the biblical record of these leaders provides evidence of various factors employed in their lives that contributed to their spiritual formation through experiences of conflict directed at them from within congregations in which they were leaders.

A. Human Identity and Conflict

This section will focus on human identity as it relates to conflict. It will do so in the various biblical and theological contexts of the Creation, the Fall, Christ, and those “in Christ.”

Creation – Genesis 1-2

Bruce Waltke writes: “‘Who am I?’ is the fundamental question of our existence. Our self-identity is the window through which we perceive and engage the world; it determines all that we do.”¹⁸² Millard Erickson states that “If who we are is at least partly a function of where we have come from, the key to man’s identity will be found in the fact that God created him.”¹⁸³ In light of these statements, this sub-section will consider two issues: the creation of humanity in the image of God, and what that means for human identity, or self-image.

¹⁸² Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 13.

¹⁸³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 488.

It is proposed that in Genesis 1-2, a human answer to the question “Who am I?” would have been “I am ‘image of God’!” In essence, that was the initial identity of humans with all its ramifications toward God, other humans as well as oneself, and creation.

What does it mean to be ‘image of God’?

The creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26-31 is the apex of the creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:3). One helpful insight into the creation account is its parallel to the construction of a cultic temple – the creation is portrayed as a cosmic sanctuary for Yahweh.¹⁸⁴ The installation of the deity’s image is the last and climactic step. As such, humankind is God’s image, created and placed in this “temple” in order “to represent and mediate the divine presence on earth.”¹⁸⁵

Genesis 1:26-27 reveals: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.” The most common understandings of the significance of what it means for humanity to be “image of God” include the substantive, relational and functional.

Substantively, there is something about humans that bears characteristics of God; there is something about what we *are* that is uniquely attributable to God, and representational of God – such is the nature of an “image.” It is also noteworthy that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, was incarnated as a human – thus, there is something about our humanity which is uniquely consistent with God. However, an “image” and “likeness”

¹⁸⁴ For support of this parallel, see Rikki Watts, “On the Edge of the Millennium: Making Sense of Genesis 1,” in *Living in the Lamplight: Christianity and Contemporary Challenges to the Gospel*, ed. Hans Boersma (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2001) 129-151; Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 64-67; J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 81-90.

¹⁸⁵ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 87.

of God has limitations – we are not God. As Waltke points out, “‘likeness’ distinguishes the image from its Creator or begetter (cf., Gen 5:3), underscores the notion that the image is only a faithful and adequate representation of God, and safeguards against any pagan notion that equates the image as deity and worthy of worship.”¹⁸⁶ Psalm 8:5 expresses humankind’s representational “likeness” of God by declaring “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings (*'elōhîm*),¹⁸⁷ and crowned him with glory and honor.”

Second, as the “image of God,” humans are distinctively relational. The statement of God “let us make man” (Gen 1:26) at once declares God as transcendent, personal and relational. “*Us ... Our ... Our ...* the plural of fulness ... unfolded as triunity, in the further ‘we’ and ‘our’ of John 14:23 (with 14:17).”¹⁸⁸ For humans, this relational component incorporates three dimensions: God-humans; human-humans (including ‘self’); and human-creation. Each human is, actually or potentially, capable of being a nexus of relationship in each of these dimensions.

Third, is the functional understanding of the image of God. It has already been noted that the “image of God” is representational of God. One aspect of this function was in the relationship of humans to creation. Humankind was to administer the creation. Genesis 1:28 states “God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue (*kābaš*) it and have dominion (*rādāh*) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” Psalm 8:6-8 takes up this theme: “You have given him dominion (*māšal*) over the works of your hands; you have put

¹⁸⁶ Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 219.

¹⁸⁷ Whether *'elōhîm* refers to God himself, the heavenly court of Yahweh, or something similar, cannot be discussed here. At this point, what is observed is the exalted dignity of humankind in both privilege and responsibility.

¹⁸⁸ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 52f.

all things under his feet ...” (v. 6). With the words *kābaš*, *rādāh*, and *māšal* the biblical text presumes a degree of conflict in the human administration of God’s creation.

The words *kābaš* and *rādāh* “entail respectively repressing and subduing/subjugating someone or something who/that resists and opposes as an enemy the exercise of authority.”¹⁸⁹ Psalm 8:6 uses *māšal*, a word which can also mean “to be like,” to convey “rule over.” One dictionary comments “exactly what the relationship, if any of [*māšal*] ‘to be like’ to [*māšal*] ‘to rule’ is not clear.”¹⁹⁰ It is possible that the psalmist’s use of *māšal* may intend a sense of ambiguity so that the concept of “rule over” is kept in wholesome tension with being “like,” or representational of, God in that rule. These three words convey conflict, or the potential for conflict, with creation. However, the conflict experienced by humans would have been as representatives of the Creator; in other words, their identity as “image of God” was consistent with the identity of God. As such, the conflicts humans would have experienced would have been of the same kind as the conflicts God would have experienced.

Humans were also to function as “image of God” to other humans who were also “image of God.” Being human does not depend upon qualities such as socio-political status, mental or physical abilities, gender, age, or ethnicity. The “image of God” was, and is, directly linked to the God of the image. As such, how a human views and treats others who are “image of God” reflects how that human views and treats the God of the image (e.g., Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 8:12).

¹⁸⁹ Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 220.

¹⁹⁰ R. Laird Harris, et al., eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:533. This resource used the transliteration *māshal* whereas the equivalent, *māšal*, has been parenthetically substituted to be consistent with the transliteration used in this project.

Functionally, relationally and substantively, the God-humankind relationship invested humans with dignity, authority and responsibility. As “image” and “likeness” of God, humankind stood in place of God in the same manner that a royal agent stood in place of an Ancient Near East suzerain. Humans belonged to God, and were to faithfully represent God within the parameters of the mandate that he had given them. They were to act as he would act as they exercised the authority he had delegated to them for being fruitful, multiplying, subduing, and ruling.

In conclusion, conflict existed actually or potentially in Genesis 1-2 between God and humans, on the one hand, and creation, on the other hand. At that point, humans led and exercised dominion as God himself would; there was no conflict between God and humans, or between one human and another. It is proposed that this absence of conflict was because the identity of humans was unswervingly consistent with being “image of God.”

The Fall – Genesis 3

The events of Genesis 3 are often referred to as the “Fall,” and reveal the (temporary and intermediate) corruption of God’s purposes, intentions and designs. This includes a corruption of human nature. Waltke states that “Sin is essentially a breach of trust, an illicit reach of unbelief, an assertion of autonomy.” He further says, “Adam and Eve’s original sin leads to a corruption of their nature, as shown by their fear after they have disobeyed God. This corruption involves a transfer from an original integrity to the corruption of human nature at its source.”¹⁹¹ Although humans still bear the image of God¹⁹² (Genesis 5:1; 9:6; James 3:9) that image has become distorted or marred by sin, and humans have somehow

¹⁹¹ Waltke, *Genesis*, 103, 102.

¹⁹² Waltke, *Genesis*, notes that “The image is not erased after the Fall but continues seminally to every individual” (70).

been diminished. Anthony Hoekema confirms this position: "... the image of God in man has been marred and corrupted by sin. We must still see fallen man as an image-bearer of God, but as one who by nature, apart from the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, images God in a distorted way."¹⁹³

Commenting on the disorder and conflict flowing from the human acts of Genesis 3, Kidner writes that "Here in embryo are the mistrusts and passions which will ravage society."¹⁹⁴ Waltke states that "The conflicts of these acts set the stage for the conflicts that will trouble characters throughout Genesis: the battle of seed, strife in marriage, the fight to master sin, and rivalry among siblings. Adam and Eve's conflict with God extends to conflicts with one another, leading first to blaming, then to power struggle, and eventually to violence."¹⁹⁵

In keeping with the narrative of Genesis 3, Paul describes the condition of unredeemed humanity in these terms: "... dead in the trespasses and sins in which you ... walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all ... lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:1-3), and "they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Eph. 4:18).

In conclusion, conflict now exists between humans and God, humans and other humans (including 'self'), as well as humans and creation. Despite humans retaining a

¹⁹³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1986), 31.

¹⁹⁴ Kidner, *Genesis*, 73.

¹⁹⁵ Waltke, *Genesis*, 83.

distorted image of God, that distortion includes a self-identity that is autonomous, and somehow alienated, from the God in whose image they were created.

Christ as the Image of God

New Testament (NT) texts attest that Christ is the “image of God” (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). As Christ, this “image of God” is uncorrupted and undistorted by the effects of the Fall. In the Lord Jesus Christ (the “last Adam” – Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45) God has redemptively initiated the New Creation that will bring to fruition and completion his purposes, intentions and designs. This New Creation is to be expressed in and through the lives of those who are “in Christ.”

In this New Creation motif, Paul declares that “as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49), and “Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). Commenting on these and other biblical texts, D. J. A. Cline writes, “... Christ, who is the true image of God. As the second man, the last Adam, Jesus is to perfection the image of God. ... As the second Adam, Christ is the head of the new humanity; therefore as Adam shares the image with his descendants, so Christ shares the image with *His* descendants, namely those that are ‘in Christ’.”¹⁹⁶ Hoekema confirms this understanding: “from looking at Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God, we learn that the proper functioning of the image includes being directed toward God, being directed toward the neighbor, and the ruling over nature.”¹⁹⁷

After considering some Pauline references to “the image,” Marianne Micks writes:

¹⁹⁶ D. J. A. Cline, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 102.

¹⁹⁷ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 75.

... the person who in the first instance bears the image, likeness, character, or glory of God is neither the average male nor the average female. Rather it is Jesus Christ, the risen Lord of the Christian community. It is he who shows us what it really means to be human. It is he who tells us what it really means to be created in the image of God. Those who are related to Christ, who are “in Christ,” come to share that image.¹⁹⁸

In a conflict that bears several parallels with the conflict of Genesis 3, Jesus is confronted by the devil with three temptations (Matt. 4:1-11; cf., Luke 4:1-13). The identity of Jesus had just been declared by the Father (Matt. 3:17): “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Two of the temptations are prefaced with “If you are the Son of God ...” (Matt. 4:3, 6). In each case Satan tries to draw “Jesus into placing self-interest above obeying his Father’s will.”¹⁹⁹ The identity, or self-image, of Jesus was fully and irrevocably invested in being “the Son of God.”

Whereas Adam was disobedient to God – a disobedience that was “a breach of trust, an illicit reach of unbelief, an assertion of autonomy,”²⁰⁰ Jesus Christ was obedient. Adam’s disobedience brought death and an identity, or self-image, alienated from God’s identity. This alienated identity resulted in, and continues to result in, conflict with God and with others. In contrast, Jesus brought life and the identity that is the uncorrupted “image of God.” It is not that Jesus did not experience conflict, but that the conflict he experienced was as “image of God” and “the Son of God.” As such, the conflict that Jesus experienced was because he was the faithful representative and mediator of the divine presence.

¹⁹⁸ Marianne H. Micks, *Our Search for Identity: Humanity in the Image of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1982), 11.

¹⁹⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 131.

²⁰⁰ Waltke, *Genesis*, 103.

On a matter related to conflict and identity, as the “image of God,” Jesus Christ also manifested a different kind of leadership. Jesus’ specific discourse on this subject is Matt.

20:25-28 (cf., Mark 10:42-45):

²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The Lord Jesus had just responded to a request by two of his disciples for positions of dignity and priority. The Lord’s response to the two disciples refers to two matters relevant to leadership. First, “you will drink my cup” (20:23) which anticipates the passion of Christ – that is, his suffering. Second, it is the Father who determines who sits on the right and left. These positions are not the result of self-seeking, but rather divine appointment.

The other disciples became indignant at the two. Jesus then addresses all the disciples concerning leadership. Their behaviour revealed they all had distorted understandings of leadership. Their agenda appeared to be no different than the Gentile rulers (i.e., Caesar, Herod, and their respective institutions). After enjoining them that “It must not be this way among you,” Jesus then revealed what leadership looks like in his kingdom. Put another way, what does leadership look like that is exercised with the identity of an undistorted “image of God” in a New Creation context? Jesus provides three further key insights into this Christ-like leadership.

The first of these additional characteristics is that Christ-like leadership requires humility: those who would be great and the first must be “your servant” and “your slave” (20:26b-27). Second, leadership is serving others, and Jesus himself is the template: “the

Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (20:28). Third, Christ-like leadership is sacrificial and redemptive: “the Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28). Thus, an alliterative summary of these five qualities of Christ-like leadership might be suffering, submitting (to God), self-less, serving (others), and sacrificing. This is the leadership of Christ who is the uncorrupted “image of God.” To lead with an identity that is “image of God” is to lead like Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Formation

Those that have been redeemed by grace through faith in Jesus Christ have been predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, who is the “image of God.”

As indicated earlier, given the original design and purpose of humanity, a declared purpose of God in and through his Son, Jesus Christ, is a new humanity. Romans 8:28-29 sets forth God’s purposes in the spiritual formation of this new humanity: “... we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image [*eikōn*] of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” This text not only echoes the divine statement of Genesis 1:26 (“Let us make man in our image [LXX: *eikōn*],²⁰¹ after our likeness ...”), but also states the ultimate goal, or *telos*, for those who are part of God’s New Creation. Furthermore, this passage expresses community; the dynamic relationship of God with this new humanity (viz., God, his Son, and many brothers and sisters²⁰²).

²⁰¹ The Hebrew word for “image” in Genesis 1:26 is translated as *eikōn* in the Greek translation called the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX).

²⁰² The Greek word translated in Rom. 8:29 as “brothers” is *adelphois* (dative plural). In this context, it is suggested that this word is inclusive of all believers, whether male or female, and therefore can properly be

Paul further addresses Christians (2 Cor. 3:18): "... we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image [*eikōn*] from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

Whereas Romans 8:29 declares the divine *telos* for the new humanity, 2 Corinthians 3:18 reveals the present process in which the members of this new humanity are implicitly invited to cooperate with the Spirit in "being transformed into the same image." Regarding this passage, Paul Barnett writes:

Paul makes it clear that we must understand our transformation to be the will of God for us and that we should actively cooperate with him in bringing to reality the eternal destiny for which we were predestined (Rom 12:1-2; 8:28-30). Our transformation is nothing else than a transformation into the moral and spiritual likeness of the now glorified Christ. It is transformation into that Christ-likeness which will be ours in the end time, when he will be the "firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29).²⁰³

A third text addresses the future realization of this *telos*: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

In summary, these three texts (i.e., Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2) reveal that those who are "in Christ" are being transformed, and will be ultimately conformed, into the image of God that is Jesus Christ. Cline employs these three texts in reaching his conclusion that "in the New [Testament], where Christ is the one true image, men are image of God in so far as they are like Christ."²⁰⁴ Romans 8:29 focuses on God's (i.e., the Father's) predestined *telos* or goal for spiritual formation established in the past: "... predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." In 1 John 3:2 the Son's future

translated as "brothers and sisters." This position is supported by various commentators such as Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 453f.

²⁰³ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 208.

²⁰⁴ Cline, "The Image of God in Man," 103.

appearance becomes the event at which the children of God are transformed: "... when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." The text of 2 Corinthians 3:18 reveals the Holy Spirit's present activity in the process of spiritual formation: "we ... are being transformed into the same image." These three portions of Scripture recognize the Trinity's (i.e., Father, Son and Spirit) active determination (in the past, present and future) to accomplish the spiritual formation and discipleship of the people of God individually and corporately. This is consistent with this project's adoption of James Wilhoit's definition of spiritual formation, or spiritual transformation: "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."²⁰⁵

Spiritual Formation and the Old Testament

Spiritual formation has been generally defined as the process of being conformed to Christ which is, implicitly, a NT perspective. Therefore, what are the implications of this definition for Old Testament (OT) characters?

There are continuities and discontinuities between the OT and the NT. Discontinuities are usually recognized in such matters as the ministry of the Spirit upon and in the people of God; experiences of the presence of God mediated by such entities as angels and theophanies in the OT, and as Jesus Christ in the NT; and, other differences between

²⁰⁵ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

As an aside, it is suggested that there is merit in the term "spiritual formation" being interchangeable with such terms as "spiritual development," "spiritual growth," "sanctification," and "discipleship." For instance, Michael Wilkins defines discipleship in much the same way as Wilhoit describes spiritual formation: "Discipleship and discipling mean living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image." See Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 42.

promise and fulfilment. Nevertheless, for present purposes, the question is whether there are sufficient continuities or similarities between the OT and NT to allow the legitimate use of the lives of OT people such as Moses, David and Jeremiah to illustrate the process of spiritual formation as defined by this project. It is suggested that a number of points may be made to cautiously allow this usage.

First, if it is accepted that the meaning of sanctification is reasonably similar to spiritual formation,²⁰⁶ and if it can be demonstrated that sanctification was experienced by OT figures, then a form of spiritual formation took place in the OT. The refrain “be holy because I [i.e., the LORD] am holy” occurs numerous times in the OT (e.g., Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7-8, 26). In the NT, Peter applies this language to Christians: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:14-16). Peter also adopts sanctification language in the opening of the same epistle: “To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood” (1 Pet. 1:1-2; cf., Rom. 6:19-22). This usage would indicate a similarity in the sanctification of the people of God in both the OT and the NT; that is, both OT and NT people of God are called to be holy just as their God is holy.

Second, the Lord Jesus is compared with OT figures as antitype-type. For example, in referring to the ‘withdrawal and return’ pattern present with Abraham (Gen. 12), Jacob (Gen. 27-32), and Israel in the wilderness, Waltke compares these as types with the antitype

²⁰⁶ See footnote 205.

of Jesus Christ in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11) and states: “All were spiritually tempered and toughened by their withdrawal for their great work.”²⁰⁷

Third, the writer of Hebrews refers to Moses’ actions in Exodus 2:11-15 as the result of Moses’ choice, considering “the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb. 11:26a) thereby, in some way, “reading back ... Christian conditions in the time of Moses.”²⁰⁸

Thus for these, and other reasons, it is proposed that a sufficient degree of continuity exists between the OT and NT to allow the lives of Moses, David and Jeremiah to illustrate the process of spiritual formation as defined by this project.

Trial and Spiritual Formation

Before exploring the lives of biblical characters for evidence of conflict as a crucible for spiritual formation in congregational leaders, a few comments on the relationship between spiritual formation, on the one hand, and trial or suffering, on the other hand, are provided. These comments may be necessary in light of the observations of Ajith Fernando, also quoted in chapter two, who writes that “one of the most serious theological blind spots in the western church is a defective understanding of suffering.”²⁰⁹

Although this project addresses the specific form of conflict directed at congregational leaders from within their own congregations, the broader issue of trials and suffering experienced by followers of Christ has much to inform congregational leaders in their conflicts. As such, Fernando’s remarks suggest that Canadian evangelical leaders may

²⁰⁷ Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 352.

²⁰⁸ Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, TNTC (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 240.

²⁰⁹ Ajith Fernando, *The Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in Your Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 51. Fernando’s expanded statement may be found at page 45.

be inclined to misinterpret the presence of trials, suffering and conflict in both their theology and experience.

Trials and suffering are to be expected by those who serve Christ faithfully (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-29; Gal. 5:11) and by those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12). Some NT writers indicate that they endured suffering on behalf of people to whom they wrote (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:6; Eph. 3:13; 2 Tim. 2:10), and that their suffering showed solidarity, in some way, with the sufferings of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:24-26).

A number of NT texts relate trials and suffering with the development of godly character. In what follows, it is presumed that suffering or trials are not experienced by a person because of his or her own wrong behaviour (e.g., 1 Peter 2:20a):

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas. 1:2-4)

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom. 5:3-5)

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

It is concluded that trial and suffering associated with conflict directed at congregational leaders can be employed by the Lord in the spiritual formation of those leaders.

B. Illustrations of Biblical Leaders in the Crucible of Conflict

The remainder of this chapter will provide illustrations of factors that contributed to the spiritual formation of those who experienced conflict directed at them personally from within congregations in which they were leaders. The biblical record of four leaders will be used for these illustrations: Moses regarding his leadership of Israel; David at the time of Absalom's rebellion; Jeremiah in his prophetic challenge to Israel; and, Paul in his defense to the Corinthian Christians, as well as some of his advice to younger leaders such as Timothy.

This use of "congregation" departs somewhat from the definition provided in chapter one in that it is applied to the children of Israel in the exodus, the kingdom of Israel during David's reign, and Judah during Jeremiah's ministry. Arguably, this is a permissible expansion of the earlier definition as the text of Scripture repeatedly refers to the "congregation of Israel" throughout the exodus narrative, as well as in Acts 7:38 where Israel is called the "congregation [*ekklēsia*] in the wilderness." In addition, David and Jeremiah both use the term "congregation" for Israel in their writings (e.g., Ps. 22:22, 25; 40:9-10; Jer. 6:18; 30:20). It is anticipated that the reader will identify the similarities between the "congregations" of these OT figures, and their NT and modern counterparts.

These four leaders and their situations are selected so that various principles may be discerned from their actions and words that demonstrate a theological and biblical foundation for the eight factors identified in the preceding chapter, as well as characteristics recognized by other approaches such as family systems theory, resilience theory, and the writing of J. Robert Clinton. This process also explains the somewhat unequal amount of space in this paper devoted to each character. The experiences of these biblical figures were not ordered to neatly fit the identified factors and theories, so at the conclusion of the consideration of

each biblical figure a brief summary will attempt to correlate the biblical record with the theoretical discernment.

It is necessary to state an additional limitation or caution when considering these biblical characters. This section seeks to discern principles from the lives of these four leaders that illustrate ways in which they responded to, processed, and dealt with conflict directed at them personally from among those they led. As stated, the purpose of these illustrations is to demonstrate the existence of theological and biblical foundations for the eight identified factors. It is implied that these principles are, at least to some extent, transferrable to the lives and ministries of modern Christian congregational leaders, as well as other followers of Jesus. However, it is to be noted that the roles of these four leaders (i.e., Moses the prophet, national “saviour” and leader; David the anointed king of Israel; Jeremiah an anointed prophet in Judah; and Paul an apostle) are significantly distinct from congregational leaders in the current Church. There is not an equivalency of the roles of those four leaders with modern congregational leaders. In this regard, Gordon Fee writes that “leadership in the New Testament people of God is never seen as outside or above the people themselves, but simply as part of the whole, essential to its well-being, but governed by the same set of ‘rules.’ They are not ‘set apart’ by ‘ordination’; rather their gifts are part of the Spirit’s work among the whole people.”²¹⁰ Even the leadership of Paul, a NT apostle, is distinct from that of modern congregational leaders. Again, Fee states that “On one hand, there were itinerants, such as the apostle Paul and others, who founded churches and exercised obvious authority over the churches they had founded. On the other hand, when the itinerant founder or his delegate was not present, leadership on the local scene seems to

²¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee, “*Laos and Leadership under the New Covenant*,” in *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2000), 132.

have been left to the hands of ‘elders,’ all expressions of which in the New Testament are plural.”²¹¹

Moses

For the first forty years of Moses’ life, it seems that he lived in two worlds. On the one hand, he had an Egyptian identity as the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter with its privileges including instruction in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Exod. 2:10; Acts 7:21-22). On the other hand, he had a Hebrew identity having been nurtured by his biological mother, a woman of faith and courage (Exod. 2:9-10; Heb. 11:23). In an incident in which an Egyptian was beating a Hebrew, Moses declared his identity with “his people” when he killed the Egyptian (Exod. 2:11-12). The next day he sought to mediate between two Hebrews struggling with each other and he was rejected by both of them. He fled to Midian to escape Pharaoh’s reprisals for having killed the Egyptian (Exod. 2:11-15; Acts 7:23-29). Another forty years passed during which Moses served in obscurity tending his father-in-law’s sheep. During this period of isolation, it would appear that Moses was weaned from the Egyptian concept of leadership and prepared for a role of leadership from the LORD.

Exodus 3-4 records Moses’ commissioning by the LORD as a leader to Israel: “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (3:10), to which Moses responds with a manifestation of his self-image and identity: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (3:11). Peter Enns comments that the earlier rejection of Moses’ leadership in Exodus 2 “is what

²¹¹ Fee, “*Laos* and Leadership under the New Covenant,” 141.

fuel's Moses' concerns about his own ability to carry out God's call."²¹² It is as if Moses does not believe that God's image of him is consistent with God's command and expectations of him. The LORD reiterates, "I will be with you" (3:12). With each command and assurance, Moses responds to the LORD with refusal and increasing doubt. Moses is being called to find his identity in his God, not simply in his people. Each of Moses' challenges to God "serve to draw out more concretely the nature of God's continued presence with Moses and the manner in which his power will be displayed to Egypt."²¹³

Daniel Block states that:

His five responses to God's call to leadership are classic. "I am nobody" (Exod. 3:11). "I have no authority" (v. 13). "I have no credibility" (4:1). "I have no talents" (v. 10). "I don't want to go" (v. 13). Remarkably in responding to these protestations the Lord refused to answer according to modern definitions of leadership, which often sound slightly narcissistic. Instead in each instance the Lord deflected Moses' focus from his own inadequacies to God's absolute sufficiencies. In the mission to which Moses was called the question was not who Moses is, but who God is.²¹⁴

Three categories of conflict directed at Moses by the children of Israel, and his responses, will now be considered: conflict concerning conditions, leadership, and implicit criticism.

Exodus 5:20-21 records the first incident of conflict directed personally at Moses (and this brother, Aaron) after his call. Moses had declared to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness'" (5:1). Pharaoh reacted by imposing greater burdens upon the people resulting in the foremen of the people coming to meet "Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh; and they said to them, 'The LORD look on you and judge,

²¹² Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 113.

²¹³ Enns, *Exodus*, 117-118.

²¹⁴ Daniel I. Block, "The Burden of Leadership: The Mosaic Paradigm of Kingship (Deut. 17:17:14-20)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162/647 (2005): 260.

because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us” (5:20-21). Moses then “turned to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil for this people, and you have not delivered your people at all” (5:22-23). The LORD then speaks to Moses with words of confirmation, encouragement and instruction. This is a pattern that is repeated numerous times in the Exodus narrative.

The general pattern in situations of conflict directed at Moses by the congregation of Israel is in four parts. First, is a complaint directed at Moses (e.g., Exod. 5:20-21; Marah – Exod. 15:24; wilderness of Sin – Exod. 16:2-3; Rephidim – Exod. 17:2-3; Kadesh – Num. 20:2-5; bronze serpent incident – Num. 21:4-7). The nature of these conflicts was about living conditions (e.g., increased work burden; lack of water or potable water; lack of food; “impatience on the way”) and the words describing these complaints were usually grumble (*lun*), and quarrel, strive or contend (*rib*). Second, is the common response of Moses to these conflicts which was to take the issue to the LORD. He “turned” (Exod. 5:22) or “cried” (Exod. 15:25; 17:4) to the LORD usually reciting the complaint in the context of his own emotions and theological stance. Third, is the response of the LORD to Moses which included words of direction (e.g., “the LORD showed him a log” – Exod. 15:25; “pass on before the people ... strike the rock” – Exod. 17:5) with words of confirmation or encouragement (e.g., “now you (singular) shall see what I will do” – Exod. 6:1). Fourth, is the action of Moses as he carried out the LORD’s directions (e.g., “and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet” – Exod. 15:25).

One situation related to this category of conflict is the lack of water at Meribah (Num. 20:2-13). Although this event bears resemblance to the water flowing from the rock that Moses had struck at Rephidim (Exod. 17:1-7), it is different. In the first incident Moses was commanded to strike the rock so that water would flow (Exod. 17:6); in the second he was to speak to the rock (Num. 20:8). The first occurred near the beginning of the exodus; the second almost forty years later. Moses was commanded to “tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water” (Num. 20:8), but instead he said to the people “you rebels: shall we (i.e., probably Aaron and himself) bring water for you out of this rock?” Then he struck the rock with his staff twice (Num. 20:10-11). Although “water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock” (Num 20:12), the LORD condemned Moses for his action on the basis that “you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel” (Num. 20:12).

Psalm 106:32-33 provides the comment that “They angered him at the waters of Meribah, and it went ill with Moses on their account, for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips.” This insight is instructive for the congregational leader faced with conflict. The need is not only to keep one’s spirit from becoming bitter and to avoid being governed by anger, but also to believe the LORD and uphold him as holy before the people. On this occasion, Moses had failed to mediate the LORD to the people, he had ceased being incarnational in his leadership, and he seems to have resorted to the identity of the ‘Moses’ before his Midian experience (Exod. 2) – using Egyptian means in an attempt to accomplish God’s ends. One can only speculate how Moses could have avoided this response – perhaps a close confessor-confidant (viz., Aaron also was condemned); perhaps understanding (i.e., being educated) that God was dealing with a new generation in a

different way than the previous one;²¹⁵ perhaps a greater awareness that he was emotionally vulnerable because of the recent death of his sister, Miriam (Num. 20:1).

A second category of conflict directed at Moses by the congregation of Israel is direct challenges to his leadership. Four instances in this category are identified: Num. 12 – the challenge of Aaron and Miriam; Num. 14 – the rebellion of the people after the report of the twelve spies; Num. 16:1-40 – the challenge of Korah and the chiefs of the congregation; and, Num. 16:41-50 – the complaint of the congregation concerning the judgment of Korah and the chiefs. The first of these incidents will be examined.

In Num. 12 Aaron and Miriam challenge the leadership of Moses. Two reasons appear to be given. First, that Moses was married to a “Cushite woman” (12:1), and second, that Aaron and Miriam questioned whether the LORD spoke only through Moses and not them as well (12:2). Moses spoke no protest to this challenge. Instead the narrative states that “the LORD heard it” (12:2), and that “the man Moses was very meek,²¹⁶ more than all people who were on the face of the earth” (12:3). In the other three instances of a leadership challenge, Moses’ initial response was to “fall on his face” (14:5; 16:4) or to “turn toward the tent of meeting” (16:42). Only at the inception of the rebellion of Korah and the chiefs did Moses speak: “In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. ... it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered

²¹⁵ Joel Litke, “Moses at the Waters of Meribah,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39/1 (2011): 31-34. Litke suggests that this new generation was “a generation that had been raised in an atmosphere of freedom from physical coercion and brute force” therefore “Moses had misjudged the mentality and development of the people, and underestimated their sensibilities, failing to assess their true nature” (33). However, the reasons for Moses’ condemnation given in Num. 20 are based upon Moses’ actions as they related to the LORD – “not believe in me, to uphold me as holy” – rather than the sensibilities of the congregation. As a result, I would suggest that Litke’s explanation does not adequately explain the nature of Moses’ failure.

²¹⁶ The common translation of “meek” has been retained despite suggestions that it should be rendered as “miserable” by Cleon Rogers and others. See David Hymes, “Heroic Leadership in the Wilderness: Part 2,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10/1 (2007): 14.

together” (16:5, 11). For Moses, these leadership challenges were not so much against himself, as against the LORD.

Returning to the challenge by Aaron and Miriam, it is the LORD who interceded by confronting Aaron and Miriam directly with a statement of his solidarity with Moses: “... my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?’ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed” (12:7-9). It was discovered that Miriam had become leprous and Moses interceded for her to the LORD.

A pattern emerges from an examination of these four leadership challenges. First, there was a challenge of Moses’ leadership. Second, there was a humble, non-confrontational response from Moses, communicating that the challenge was against the LORD rather than Moses. Third, there was a confirmation by the LORD of Moses’ leadership followed by a divinely initiated public judgment of those who mounted the challenge. Fourth, there was an intercession by Moses before the LORD on behalf of the congregation, or certain individuals.

A third category of conflict directed at Moses by the congregation of Israel concerned implicit criticism. This form of conflict is more subtle, but no less real. In Num. 11 the people complained “about their misfortunes” (11:1) and expressed their “strong craving” for Egyptian foods (11:4-6). Moses “heard the people weeping” and it appears that he could neither meet their needs nor bear their expressions of dissatisfaction any longer. As a result he said to the LORD: “why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? ... I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for

me” (11:11, 14). This is a sentiment that modern congregational leaders may experience from time-to-time – loneliness coupled with a sense of inadequacy and a grinding burden. The LORD’s response was to bring seventy men of the elders of Israel and “I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone” (11:17). The heart of Moses is revealed when two of these men begin to prophesy in the camp. Joshua interpreted this as competition with Moses, to which Moses responded “Are you jealous for my sake: Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (11:29).

In this analysis of conflicts directed against Moses, is there evidence of spiritual formation in Moses through these conflicts? A comparison of the first and last of these incidents of conflict appears to indicate development in Moses which is demonstrated in two ways. First, growth is demonstrated in Moses’ relationship with the LORD, and second, it is demonstrated in the people’s recognition of the association of Moses’ leadership with the LORD. The first and last incidents of conflict will be used to exhibit these evidences of spiritual formation in Moses. In the first of the conflicts (Exod. 5:20-21) the representatives of the congregation attributed their increased burden to Moses and set his leadership in contrast to the LORD. In the last of the conflicts (Num. 21:4-9), the people acknowledged that Moses and his leadership were one with the LORD – “the people spoke against God and against Moses” (21:5; underlining added), and “we have spoken against the LORD and against you” (21:7; underlining added). This comparison suggests long-term growth in Moses and his leadership that was discerned by the people.

Again, the response of Moses to the initial conflict was one in which he questioned God's commission to him, and echoed the people's complaint to the LORD (Exod. 5:22-23). The LORD's patient response to Moses was one of assurance (6:1), confirmation (6:2-5), instruction (6:6-8), and reassurance (6:10-13; 7:1-9), after which Moses, with Aaron, went before Pharaoh (7:10-13). In the last of the conflicts, Moses simply "prayed for the people" (Num 21:7b), and "The LORD said to Moses ... so Moses ..." (8-9). These later cryptic statements imply a more mature knowledge and trust of the LORD and his ways. There is no need for Moses to be re-assured, instructed in details, or told how the LORD would act – Moses simply brings the request to his God, hears his response, and obeys. This may be an illustration of the psalmist's insight: "He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel" (Ps. 103:7; underlining added).

A further insight into the spiritual formation of Moses is provided by J. Robert Clinton. These incidents of conflict against Moses were, what Clinton calls, leadership backlash process items. He writes that "A leader experiencing leadership backlash learns through conflict with others to submit to God in a deeper way."²¹⁷ It is suggested that Moses' submission "to God in a deeper way" has been demonstrated in the preceding comments regarding his spiritual growth. However, from another perspective, his submission to God in a deeper way reflects something of the practice of spiritual disciplines and their fruit. For instance, it could be said that in these conflicts Moses was attentive to the words that the LORD spoke; he moved from listening to the LORD's words to translating them into his context; in his obedience, he offered himself and experienced everything that God was for him; and, he submitted to the divine revelation and lived it. Moses' attentiveness and

²¹⁷ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 108.

obedience to God's word bear marked similarities to the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* (i.e., divine reading).²¹⁸

In matters of challenges to his leadership, Moses' response in Num. 11:29 echoes something of the self-sacrificing and self-less character of the servant-leader described by the Lord Jesus (cf., Matt. 20:25-28).

In summary, it is proposed that Moses demonstrates spiritual growth through conflict. Five of the eight factors earlier identified in chapter two may be explicitly recognized in Moses' life: an existing intimacy with God; core beliefs that are theologically sound and functional (e.g., God's sovereignty); the acquisition and adaptation of training and education (e.g., Egyptian wisdom coupled with isolation in Midian and experience of the LORD); practices that bear an evocative correspondence with spiritual disciplines (e.g., *lectio divina*); and, a strong awareness of his call by, and to, the LORD. In addition, emotional and physical health may be implied by observing Moses' apparent vitality: "Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated" (Deut. 34:7). One factor which seems to be lacking in Moses' life was a close and reliable confessor-confidant. To some extent, Moses' confessor-confidant may have been his brother Aaron, although Aaron was not always reliable (e.g., Exo. 32 – his misdirected leadership in the matter of the golden calf). Regarding others, Moses' attitude towards his antagonists and towards the

²¹⁸ For a description of *lectio divina* see, for example, Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2006). Peterson describes the four main components of *lectio divina* as *lectio* (i.e., attentive reading); *meditatio* which "moves from looking at the words of the text to entering the world of the text" (99); *oratio* or prayer which Peterson describes as "an offering of ourselves, just as we are ... (and) access to everything that God is for us" (106f.); and, *contemplatio* which means "living the read/mediated/prayed text in the everyday, ordinary world ... submitting to the biblical revelation, taking it within ourselves, and then living it unpretentiously, without fanfare" (109, 112).

congregation was typically one of gracious intercession, although there were times of divinely initiated judgment. Overall, it is proposed that Moses' life illustrates biblical principles for leaders subjected to conflict from among those they lead.

David

The particular theme of conflict directed at David from among those he led was triggered by his own sinful actions. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, arranged for the killing of her husband, and breached the trust of a nation (2 Samuel 11). The prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin (2 Samuel 12).

This reflection attempts to explore two matters relevant to conflict directed at leaders from within their congregations. First, is the issue of conflict resulting from the sinful behaviour of a leader; second, is an insight into intrapersonal conflict (i.e., conflict within) experienced by a leader.

The prophet Nathan was sent to David by the LORD (2 Sam. 12:1), evidencing that the LORD takes action when one of his leaders sins. Nathan's skilful use of a parable brings David to public confession of his sin (12:13). Although David is forgiven, the consequences of his sinful actions are not erased (12:10-14). A series of events unfold that result in the defilement, death, and rebellion of others, all of which mirror and magnify his own sinful actions as a leader.

Psalm 51 expresses the interior crisis and recovery of David before God in the immediate aftermath of his exposure by Nathan. There was a struggle between what he had done, and what he should have done. His intrapersonal conflict is explained by "the gulf

between what God desires (51:6a) and what David has just confessed.”²¹⁹ This internal dissonance is resolved as David repents, confesses and is forgiven. In this, David experientially recovers his identity as a redeemed person and a godly leader – his sin replaced by God’s righteousness; and his deception by God’s truth – a condition evoked by Ps. 32.

Later in the narrative, Absalom (one of David’s sons) leads a rebellion (2 Sam. 15:1-19:43). In this context of conflict directed at David from within his own nation we are invited into the turmoil of David’s inner life through Pss. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 23.²²⁰ Pss. 3-6 are psalms of personal lament. Ps. 6 expresses deep anguish and profound disorientation. David states “My soul ... is greatly troubled;” he moans and weeps so profusely that he drenches his couch; his anguish is so deep that he feels physical pain (“my bones are troubled”) – and yet, the psalm ends with a note of hope. Understood in the context of Absalom’s rebellion, Psalm 23 takes on renewed meaning in David’s experience of the LORD’s shepherd care and rich provision in the midst of his enemies. Reflection upon these and other psalms provides insight into the depth of intrapersonal conflict that a leader may experience, as well as the way forward to reorientation, and growth in a leader’s relationship with the Lord.

In summary, this brief exploration of two incidents in David’s life illustrates something of a leader’s intrapersonal conflict. There are some experiences that must be borne alone with God. One is in the experience of a leader’s own sin; the other in the experience of another’s rebellion. Again, some of the factors recognized in these incidents

²¹⁹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 191.

²²⁰ The historical context of Absalom’s rebellion for these five psalms (Pss. 3-6; 23) has been proposed by E. M. Blaiklock, *The Psalms of the Great Rebellion* (London, UK: Lakeland, 1970); J. R. Lundbom, “Psalm 23: Song of Passage,” *Interpretation* 40/1 (1986): 5-16; and others.

include David's deep yearning for cleansing and forgiveness, as well as reorientation and vindication, in his relationship with God and others; core beliefs that are theologically grounded and functional (e.g., God's righteousness and grace [*hesed*]²²¹); the practice of the spiritual discipline of confession and being forgiven; a strong awareness of his call by and to the LORD; and, a confessor-confidant in the prophet Nathan who was willing to do and say what was needed. David's mental well-being is evident in his psalms as we observe his emotional turmoil, transparent honesty, expressed hope, and renewed joy.

Jeremiah

J. Robert Clinton observes that "Jeremiah's personal conflict items have to do with his self-image, the persecution he faced His ministry conflict included the various tasks or assignments that he received and the reaction to his ministry."²²² An example of such conflict is set out in Jeremiah 26. Jeremiah was commanded by the LORD to "stand in the court of the LORD's house and speak" (26:2) a message calling for repentance. The audience was composed of "the priests and the prophets and all the people" (26:7) who reacted with the judgment "You shall die!" (26:8). The officials heard the accusation and Jeremiah's response (29:12-15), a response that bore the qualities of the non-anxious presence of a self-differentiated leader. Jeremiah's last clause revealed the foundation for his confidence: "in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears" (26:15b).

²²¹ The word *hesed* is not, strictly speaking, equivalent to 'grace' but there are significant similarities. Daniel Block states: "*Hesed* is ... a strong relational term that wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts, all the positive attributes of God – love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness; in short, that quality that moves a person to act for the benefit of another without respect to the advantage it might bring to the one who expresses it." See Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1999), 605.

²²² J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 163.

A more extensive examination of the life of Jeremiah would manifest growth in his relationship to his God. He had a living relationship with God; his core beliefs were theologically sound and functional (e.g., God's sovereignty); as the son of a priest (1:1), it is probable that he was well-educated and trained in the *torah*; he engaged in spiritual disciplines such as intercessory prayer (29:7; 37:3; 42:2, 4); when commissioned, Jeremiah confessed "I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (1:6), but later his identity was found in his relationship to the LORD as his prophet; and, Baruch the son of Neriah (Jer. 32; 36; 43; 45) stood with Jeremiah as a trustworthy friend and co-worker, perhaps even as a confessor-confidant. Again, much in Jeremiah's experiences of conflict manifested some of the theological foundations for the eight categories identified in the preceding chapter.

Paul

Paul's experience with conflict and resulting spiritual formation will be considered primarily through the lens of 2 Corinthians. The reason for this choice of text is that that epistle resonates with tension between Paul and the Corinthian congregation, particularly in 2 Cor. 10-13. Early indications of this tension may be discerned in 1 Cor. 4:18-19 regarding arrogant people; 1 Cor. 9:3-4 in which Paul refers to his "defence to those who examine me"; and, 1 Cor. 14:37-38 where it appears that others claiming to be prophets or spiritual challenged the authority and veracity of Paul. Within the context of the Corinthian church, 2 Cor. 1-7 refer to a personal attack upon Paul, and chapters 10-13 to conflict directed at him by "false apostles."²²³

²²³ Colin Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, TNTC (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1987), 40-52.

In 2 Cor. 1-7 it appears that an individual within the congregation had mounted an attack against Paul personally and his apostolic authority, which was aggravated by the failure of other church members to support Paul (2:3).²²⁴ David Garland points out the concentration of pain language in 2:1-5 and suggests that “Paul may have in mind being humiliated by them.”²²⁵ Although there are various proposals of the reasons for the attack, these are not relevant for this inquiry as the purpose of this section is to discern Paul’s responses to conflict and how those may have contributed to his spiritual formation.

In 2 Cor. 10-13 Paul defends his apostleship against those he calls “false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13). The nature of the attack against Paul included accusations that he was “walking according to the flesh” (10:3), and that his ministry lacked skillful speaking (11:5-6) and apostolic signs (12:11-12). In short, these antagonists were attempting to destroy Paul and his ministry. It is noteworthy that the theme of Paul’s defense is not to justify himself as much as to uphold the ministry he had been divinely given – “Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved” (12:19). His goal was to fulfill his ministry by being the means of blessing to the Corinthians – “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?” (12:15; also 10:8; 11:2). Throughout this defense Paul exhibits the qualities of the leadership spoken of by Jesus Christ (Matt. 20:20-28); namely, a leader who suffers, submits (to God), is self-less, serves (others), and sacrifices for those under his care. This manifestation of Christ-like leadership in Paul was expressed in his

²²⁴ Kruse, *Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 43.

²²⁵ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1999), 113. The noun “pain” (*lupē*) appears twice (2:1, 3), and the verb (*lupeō*) five times (2:2[2x], 4, 5[2x]).

response to the Corinthian believers, and implies spiritual formation through the things that he experienced at their hands.

Some of the other factors that have been identified as contributing to spiritual formation through conflict may be observed in the life and ministry of Paul through insights gained from a careful reading of 2 Corinthians. One such insight is that Paul's theology is being lived out in the reality of his relationship with his God. For instance, 2 Cor. 1:5 states that "as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too." Here is demonstrated Paul's identity with Christ both in his suffering and in his comfort, with the additional benefit that he is able to apply that same comfort to others.²²⁶ For himself and others, Paul's thoroughly Trinitarian theology (1:21-22; 13:14) is expressed in such a way as to demonstrate the relationship of the triune God to the believers in grace, love and fellowship.

Paul is deeply conscious of his calling and purpose which is evidenced by his numerous references to it (5:18-20; also 2:17; 3:4-6): "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

Although he suffered physically and emotionally as part of his faithful service, his emotional health is evident in such statements as "we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (4:16; also 2:4).

²²⁶ Scott J. Hafemann, "The Comfort and Power of the Gospel: The Argument of 2 Corinthians 1-3," *Review and Expositor* 86/3 (1989): 328-239.

Regarding others, Paul's pastoral character is notable in 2 Corinthians. In the case of the Corinthian Christians he manifests not only his love for them (2:4; 6:11; 12:15), but also God's love for them (13:11, 14); his desire that they experience joy (1:24; 2:3) and not pain or sorrow (2:4); and, his willingness to serve them and suffer for them (12:14-15). In the case of the repentance of an antagonist, the person who had mounted a personal attack against him (2 Cor. 1-7), Paul desires that person be forgiven, comforted, and reaffirmed in love (2:5-11). In the matter of a confessor-confidant there were those who worked closely with Paul – Silvanus (probably, Silas – 1:19; also Acts 15:22, 40), Timothy (1:1, 19), and Titus (7:6, 13-14; 8:6, 16, 23). At various times in Paul's life there were others who acted as confessor-confidants or mentors such as Barnabas (Acts 9:27; 11:25-30; 15:2), perhaps Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18; Rom. 16:3) as well as Rufus' mother "who has been a mother to me as well" (Rom. 16:13).

Paul's experiences related in 2 Cor. 6:1-10 also demonstrate the concept of resilience in his life and ministry. Although this testimonial is not limited to conflict directed at him from within the Corinthian church, it can be argued that the principles of resilience are relevant to his defense to these Christians. David Forney²²⁷ states Paul had acquired endurance (*hupomonē*) that is "the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty."²²⁸ Forney comments that "this type of endurance ... is not submissiveness, where a person simply receives the hardship with resignation. Rather, endurance for a minister of Jesus Christ is the ability to bear all things in such a way that the hardship becomes transformative,

²²⁷ David Forney, "A Calm in the Tempest: Developing Resilience in Religious Leaders," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 9/1 (2010): 1-33.

²²⁸ W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3d ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "ὑπομονή." Hereinafter, this resource will be referred to as BDAG.

even to the point of becoming a blessing.”²²⁹ Forney identifies four elements of resilient leaders that are present in Paul which advance the consideration of factors that contribute to spiritual formation through adversity, in particular, conflict. First, is living into the call given to him by God. Paul had a deep and abiding sense of God’s claim on his life and ministry. Second, is focusing on those things he could influence, and not being defeated by those he could not influence. These two factors are exhibited in Paul as he writes: “knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God ... For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us ... All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation ... we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ... Working together with him, then, we appeal to you ...” (2 Cor. 5:11-6:1). In these statements Paul expresses his deep awareness of God’s calling upon his life and his full engagement in those things he was called to do.

The third element is living with and through the pain of one’s situation. This has already been addressed to some extent. It is not that pain is sought, but neither is it avoided, especially when it is part and parcel of a life being lived for God. Perhaps the pain most directly related to conflict directed at Paul from within the church at Corinth is captured by Paul’s words in 2 Cor. 2:4 – “I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.” Although not directly a result of conflict directed at him from within the church at Corinth, Paul relates affliction and suffering that he experienced as a servant of Christ: “we

²²⁹ Forney, “A Calm in the Tempest,” 4.

do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2Cor. 4:16-18). Paul experienced suffering because of his allegiance to Jesus Christ. He neither avoided this suffering, nor complained about it – rather he embraced it as an experience through which he was being transformed into the image of Christ by the grace and power of the Spirit of God.

A fourth element identified by Forney is developing genuine friendships. As indicated earlier, this component is present in the portrait of Paul’s life and ministry in 2 Corinthians. Authentic friendships may be discerned in this epistle. Titus’ name is mentioned at least nine times (2:13; 7:6, 13, 14; 8:6, 16, 23; 13:18 [twice]) and the first two references are sufficient to express Paul’s closeness to him: “my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia” (2 Cor. 2:13) and “God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor. 7:6).

To these elements are added other indicators of Paul’s resiliency, whether in spirit, emotion or body, as expressed in 2 Cor. 4:7-12:

... we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Paul's spiritual formation is confirmed in his statements that his identity is located "in Christ" in such matters as his sufferings and comfort (1:5), his life (2:14), his love (5:14), his service as an ambassador for Christ as God makes his appeal through him (5:20), his attitude of meekness and gentleness (10:1), and his words (12:19). His formation was still in process as evidenced by Paul's inclusion in the statement that "we all ... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (3:18; underlining added).

Paul's Teaching

The Pastoral Epistles written to Timothy and Titus are letters written later in Paul's apostolic career. They include instruction to younger leaders on issues at the intersection of leadership, conflict and spiritual formation. What are some of the things that can be discerned from his teaching that speak to this project?

First, Paul provides some practical direction regarding congregational leaders in 1 Tim. 5:17-22. Included are the matters concerning accusations against, and discipline of, congregational leaders. Any charge brought against a leader is to be subject to due process including the evidence of two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19; cf., Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1). If a leader persists in sin that leader is to be publicly rebuked. The word translated here as "rebuke" (*elegchō*) means "to express strong disapproval of someone's action," although it has a range of meaning that could include the process of examining carefully, and bringing a person to the point of recognizing wrongdoing.²³⁰ This general congregational governance model is the basis for preventing rumours, slander, and the 'court' of (un)popularity

²³⁰ BDAG, s.v., "ἐλέγχω."

undermining proper leadership, while providing a public forum for dealing with substantiated charges and persistent wrongdoing by leaders.

Second, in 1 Tim. 5:23 Paul counsels Timothy in a matter of physical health: “no longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” This advice may be placed here as a corrective to ascetic abstinence.²³¹ It should also be read with texts enjoining abuses such as those who may be “addicted to much wine” (3:8). Generally, it would appear that this advice is consistent with a leader’s wholesome attention to his or her physical condition.

Third, Timothy is reminded of his intimate awareness of Paul’s lifestyle, attitudes and experiences: “my teaching, my conduct, my aim of life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness (*hupomonē*),²³² my persecutions and sufferings ... indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:10-12). This suggests that Timothy benefited from his relationship with Paul not only as a teacher and model for leadership and service, but also as a mentor and confessor-confidant.

Fourth, Paul warned Timothy about an antagonist: “Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message” (2 Tim. 4:14-15). This person appears to be a biblical example of Haugk’s hard-core or major antagonists²³³ as evidenced by Paul’s personal and

²³¹ See generally, Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2006), 375-376.

²³² This quality of *hupomonē* is the endurance or steadfastness exhibited by Paul as noted by Forney. See pages 93-94 above.

²³³ Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 38-39. See also, Marshall Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Word, 1985); Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988); and, Lloyd G. Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

emphatic statement: he “did me great harm.” If this man is the same as the Alexander referred to in 1 Tim. 1:20, congregational action had been taken in expelling him as a blasphemer.²³⁴ Paul left further judgment of this antagonist to the Lord (“the Lord will repay him”), although he provided a strong cautionary warning to Timothy.

C. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to lay out a biblical and theological foundation for conflict as a crucible for spiritual formation in congregational leaders.

In the first section, the argument endeavoured to demonstrate biblically that identity and conflict are directly related. As the humans of Gen. 1-2 administered over the creation in their identity as “image of God” they would have encountered conflict. Similarly, Jesus Christ as the true “image of God” also experienced conflict. In both of those cases, any conflict with the “image of God” was an expression of conflict with the God of the image.

From the events of Gen. 3, humanity has become alienated from the God of the image, and as a result their identities have, in some way, diverged from what it is to be true “image of God.” The identities of fallen humanity result in conflict not only with the God of the image, but also with others who bear the now-distorted “image of God.”

As members of fallen humanity are redeemed by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, their identities are being transformed to become more and more like Jesus Christ. The focus of this project is that conflict, particularly conflict directed at congregational leaders, is a crucible that can be used by God for spiritual formation of the identities of those leaders.

²³⁴ Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 630-635.

The second section ventured to demonstrate a biblical basis for each of the eight categories of factors that contributed to spiritual formation in leaders experiencing conflict. Those eight categories are: an existing and growing intimacy with God; a functioning biblical theology; training for wholesome and competent behaviour; practising spiritual disciplines; being oriented to, and in, one's calling; attending to emotional and mental health; attending to physical health; and, relating wholesomely to others, with particular attention to leaders' relationships with antagonists as well as confessor-confidants. Biblical evidence was also elicited from the lives of the four biblical leaders to show the basis for aspects of family systems theory, resilience theory and the writing of J. Robert Clinton.

It is concluded that there is ample biblical evidence that these eight categories identify factors that contributed to the spiritual formation of leaders who experienced conflict directed at them personally from within their "congregations." It is not argued that there is a precise and invariable formula for application of these factors. Ultimately, spiritual formation is the work of the Holy Spirit. The congregational leader, like every other follower of Jesus, is called to cooperate in that work of grace, even if it is in a crucible of conflict.

Chapter 4 - Data Collection and Analysis

*If you're a leader and you aren't experiencing some opposition to your leadership, you must be a brand-new leader, you aren't accomplishing anything of spiritual significance, or something is seriously wrong.*²³⁵

This chapter will present an analysis of the data obtained from this research project. To accomplish this, it is first necessary to set the stage by describing the project, its subjects, and the research instrument used. Once this has been done, resulting data will then be presented and examined.

Consideration of the data will take place in three phases, beginning with the general and moving toward the specific. The first and most general phase will briefly look at a comparison of some elements of this Project²³⁶ with the American CTI Report.²³⁷ The purpose for this assessment is to test a common presumption that the Canadian evangelical congregational experience is the same, or similar to, the American experience. The second phase will examine some of the variables that appear to contribute to a greater or lesser incidence of conflicts directed personally at congregational leaders from within their congregations. These two phases will provide a better understanding for the setting of such

²³⁵ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 126.

²³⁶ For purposes of clarity, and to distinguish this research project from the CTI Report, the survey results of "Conflict as a Crucible for Spiritual Formation in Congregational Leaders" shall be referred to as the "Project."

²³⁷ Eric Reed, "Leadership Surveys Church Conflict," *Leadership* 25/4 (2004): 25-26. The report upon which this article is based was prepared by *Christianity Today International* and is entitled "Managing Church Conflict: The Source, Pastors Reactions and Its Effects,"

<http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/downloads/churchresearch/cr12.html> (accessed June 22, 2010). Hereinafter this report will be referred to as the "CTI Report."

conflicts, and the validity of the resources and models often relied upon by Canadian evangelical congregational leaders for dealing with these conflicts.

The third and most specific phase of the analysis involves listening to congregational leaders who have experienced conflict directed at them from within their congregations. It is in this phase that the data will be analyzed to determine, among other things, whether congregational leaders recognize and employ any or all of the eight categories of factors identified in chapters two and three and, if so, how and to what extent.

A. Description of Project

Chapter one cited research that reported the high incidence of conflict experienced by congregational leaders. A heavy toll is paid for this conflict, too frequently resulting in these leaders being wounded deeply and leaving vocational Christian ministry altogether.

The intended result of this Project is to equip congregational leaders to be more competent and wholesome in how they deal with their experiences of conflict to the end that they will grow in their relationship with Christ as they serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit. As a modest movement toward this goal, this study undertook to survey congregational leaders who had experienced conflict directed at them, and to listen to what they have to say. The research question was: “Among leaders of Canadian Evangelical congregations who have experienced congregational conflict directed at them personally, what critical factors do they claim have contributed to their own spiritual formation.” The primary focus was to identify and categorize those critical factors reported by congregational leaders experiencing conflict that they attest contributed to their spiritual formation.

In addition to the primary focus of this research, a number of collateral matters provide some context and direction for the central issue. One of these collateral matters is the question of what variables may contribute to conflict against a congregational leader being more or less probable. These variables may include the leader's position, length of service, age, gender, or the congregation's governance model or denominational affiliation. Another collateral matter is the issue of the validity of a common presumption that the Canadian and American experiences of conflict against congregational leaders are similar or the same. If this presumption is correct then, for instance, use of American resources by Canadian leaders is justified. However, if this presumption is not correct then the use of American resources by Canadian leaders may compound the problem.

B. Description of Selection of Subjects

In view of the perceived significance of the issue of conflict directed at congregational leaders, this author purposed to draw upon a large but manageable sample of congregational leaders. The broader experiences of a larger group would provide greater opportunity to detect significant common insights into conflict directed at congregational leaders and how those leaders dealt with that conflict.

Given that the author's ecclesial and vocational environment has been Canadian evangelical Christian congregations, congregational leaders within this context were selected as a delimitation of the class of congregational leaders. This sub-group was further delimited to leaders of English-speaking congregations for the purpose of avoiding, or at least minimizing, variables attributable to differences in cultures. Further, delimiting the potential sample to Canada provides an opportunity to compare the experiences of conflict by

Canadian congregational leaders with their American counterparts as recounted in the CTI Report. The denominations represented by ACTS Seminaries were identified as meeting these general criteria.

The denominations associated as ACTS Seminaries in 2010 were (in alphabetical order) the Baptist General Conference of Canada (BGCC), the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC), the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada (CMAC),²³⁸ the Evangelical Free Church of Canada (EFCC), the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada (FEBCC), and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC).

In order to gain denominational consents for participation, the author first contacted regional or district representatives for each of these denominations in October 2010. The purpose of this contact was to introduce the Project, to explain the potential benefits to the particular denominations and the Church at large, and to respond to any questions or concerns that might be raised relating to denominational participation. Each representative gave his approval for the author to communicate with a national representative for each of their respective denominations.²³⁹

During November and December 2010, the author communicated with the appropriate national representative for each of the six denominations. A personalized introductory e-mail was sent to each national representative on or about November 1, 2010 in the form attached as Appendix 'A'. Shortly after sending that e-mail, the author spoke with

²³⁸ CMAC amicably withdrew from the ACTS consortium in or about May 2010 to pursue its commitments at Ambrose University College and Seminary in Calgary, Alberta. The author determined that CMAC would be a significant and valuable contributor to this Project. When approached with the request to participate in this research, CMAC readily agreed.

²³⁹ The author thanks those district, regional or other representatives of the six denominations for their consideration and support of the author's request: Dr. Daryl Busby for BGCC; Steve Berg of BCMB (for CCMBC); David Hearn for CMAC; Rob Stewart for EFCC; Dr. Larry Perkins for FEBCC; and, Dr. Jim Lucas for PAOC.

the national representative for each denomination by telephone or in person. During each conversation a presentation of the Project was made to the national representative with an opportunity for questions and related discussion. As a result of those communications, each of these representatives granted their agreement for their denomination's participation at the national level.²⁴⁰

As a result of the agreement of each of these denominations, a confirming e-mail was sent on December 19, 2010 to each national representative in the form attached as Appendix 'B'. Attached to each of these e-mails was the proposed form of invitation to be sent by the national denominational office to each of their pastors and other congregational leaders of English-speaking congregations within the requested time-frame. As indicated in that e-mail, it was proposed that each denominational office would put the form of invitation on its denominational letterhead, add the appropriate national denominational representative's name, and forward it by e-mail to each designated congregational leader in or about the second week of January 2011. It was calculated that this timing would maximize awareness of, and participation in, the survey.

A further e-mail was forwarded to each national denominational representative January 5, 2011 in the form attached as Appendix 'C'. This was forwarded as a continuation of the e-mail of December 19, 2010 and retained the form of invitation for purposes of context and ease of reference. At that time a request was also made for specific information

²⁴⁰ The author thanks those national and other representatives of the six denominations for their consideration and agreement to participate in the Project: Jamey S. McDonald, Executive Director for BGCC; David Wiebe, Executive Director, and Ewald Unruh, an interim Executive Director, for CCMBC; David Freeman, Vice-President of CMAC; Bill Taylor, Executive Director for EFCC; Regional Directors for FEBCC – David Horita (Pacific Region), Bob Flemming (Central Region), and Glenn Goode (Atlantic Region), together with Ernest Kennedy, as interim President of FEBCC; and, David Hazzard, Assistant Superintendent for Fellowship Services for PAOC.

necessary to establish a statistical base for the research. The requested information included the current number of English-speaking congregations, pastors for those congregations, and the number of congregational leaders who received the e-mail invitation when it was sent. A true copy of the e-mail invitation sent to those congregational leaders was also requested as confirmation.

Each denomination sent e-mail invitations to the pastors of its English-speaking congregations in the form attached as Appendix 'D'. Although each denomination had the liberty of recommending alternate wording for the letter of invitation, all the denominations adopted the proposed wording without amendment. This form of letter was put on each denomination's national letterhead over the signature of a national denominational representative. These e-mail invitations were sent from the national offices of each denomination on or about the following dates:

BGCC	February 11, 2011
CCMBC	January 12, 2011
CMAC	January 21, 2011
EFCC	January 10, 2011
FEBCC	Pacific: January 10, 2011
	Central: February 4, 2011 ²⁴¹
	Atlantic: January 25, 2011
PAOC	January 18, 2011.

²⁴¹ The initial e-mail invitation was inadvertently sent by that regional office to congregational leaders December 21, 2010. The e-mail invitation was re-sent to these congregational leaders from that regional office February 4, 2011 with an explanation for the follow-up.

Access to the on-line survey was open up to and including February 28, 2011 at which time collection of data from respondents was concluded.

C. Development of Research Instrument

General considerations

As indicated in chapter one, the nature of the research question suggested a descriptive and appreciative inquiry. The potentially large sample size from the six denominations spread across Canada commended a self-reporting questionnaire with data requested and collected at one point in time. This approach appeared to be most practical, not only for contact and response, but also for analysis.

For purposes of this Project, a partnership agreement was entered into with Outreach Canada (OC).²⁴² This agreement allowed for access to, and comparison of, some current national data for evangelical and other denominations across Canada. It also provided access to expertise in information technology and to resources for computerized data collection. This assistance facilitated the posting of a nation-wide on-line survey for participation by pastors and other congregational leaders, as well as the collection and analysis of data.

The survey was designed to collect relevant data that would not only provide insight into how congregational leaders have responded to, processed, and grown through the experience of conflict directed at them personally, but also supply important information about such conflict and permit comparison with the American experience of congregational conflict contained in the CTI Report. As such the research instrument would need to ask for quantitative data for comparative and other purposes, and allow respondents to relate their

²⁴² Outreach Canada (OC) serves churches and Christian leaders from many denominations and affiliations throughout Canada and elsewhere. For further information, OC's website may be accessed at <http://en.outreach.ca/Start.aspx>.

experiences of conflict and the factors they claim had enabled them to deal with their conflicts. Therefore, the survey integrated mixed methods procedures; that is, it combined both quantitative and qualitative responses to allow for the collection of data that is not only objective and measureable, but also subjective and reflective.

In order to make some comparisons with the American experience of conflict, adopting parallel questions with a questionnaire such as that used for the CTI Report was required. Communications with CTI representatives, as well as the researcher for that study, determined that the CTI questionnaire was no longer available.²⁴³ As a result the CTI Report was used to “reverse engineer” numerous questions for this Project’s survey.²⁴⁴

Given the nature of this Project and the investigative process, it was anticipated that the qualitative responses would be more probative in speaking to the research question. It was also suspected that the qualitative responses would provide important insights that may not be easily quantified²⁴⁵ as participants related their own “stories” in their own ways. On these bases, it is proposed that the qualitative responses should be weighted more heavily than the quantitative. The combination of quantitative and qualitative responses will also enable a limited comparison of those responses. Given the proposed priority of the qualitative responses, the quantitative responses will be secondary yet still important. The comparison of these two types of responses may confirm responses or identify inconsistencies in the qualitative reflections. They may also permit a comparison with the

²⁴³ In communications between June 16 and August 27, 2010 between this author and Kevin Miller, editor-at-large for *Leadership Journal of Christianity Today International* (CTI), and Cynia Solver, the researcher for the CTI Report, it was concluded that the questionnaire used for that report was no longer available.

²⁴⁴ This author thanks Cynia Solver, researcher for the CTI Report, who, between August 28 and September 13, 2010, kindly reviewed a draft of this Project’s survey to confirm sufficient parallels with her questionnaire to provide a basis for some comparison between the results of this Project and the CTI Report.

²⁴⁵ It is acknowledged that qualitative responses can be coded and categorized and, to some extent, quantified.

CTI Report thereby indicating potential differences between Canadian and American experiences of conflict directed at congregational leaders.

Description of research instrument

The e-mail invitations sent to congregational leaders by the national offices of each participating denomination incorporated an embedded website link. When a congregational leader opened the e-mail, he or she was asked to click on the link which would open the Project Letter and Consent. The individual was required to consent to participating in the survey before the survey could be opened. A true copy of the Project Information Letter and Consent, the Survey, and the Survey Conclusion as posted on the internet is attached as Appendix 'E'.

Conflict was not defined in the research instrument. The introduction to the survey referred to conflict and used phrases such as “the experience of conflict,” “congregational conflict,” and “conflict that may have been directed at you personally as a leader within a congregation,” however, there were no specific definitions or descriptions of conflict. The absence of a definition of conflict required respondents to apply their own understandings of this term to their responses. Thus the survey neither directed nor limited the respondents in using their concepts and experiences of conflict.

It was anticipated that not all respondents would have experienced conflict directed at them as leaders from within their congregations. However, valuable data could still be provided by those respondents that would contribute not only to an understanding of the prevalence and nature of conflict directed against leaders, but also to a basis for some comparisons with the CTI Report. For this reason, the first nine questions of the survey were

quantitative and addressed such issues as a congregational leader's position, age, gender, length of service, denominational affiliation, and experience of congregational conflict. The tenth question raised a key issue for this research: "At any time while you have served in a congregation in some leadership position, have you experienced conflict directed at you personally from within a congregation?" (underlining in survey). If respondents responded with "No" they were thanked for their participation and were connected to the Survey Conclusion.

Those who responded with a "Yes" to question 10 (Q10)²⁴⁶ continued with the survey. At that point, respondents were requested to identify one significant conflict directed at them as leaders from within their congregations, and were invited to briefly describe that incident of conflict. They were asked to keep that identified incident of conflict before them as they responded to the remainder of the survey. The survey continued by inquiring about their status at the time of that conflict. For instance, they were asked about their leadership position, church size and denomination at the time of the incident of conflict, and how they learned of that conflict. These respondents were also asked what their initial responses to the conflict were; how they dealt with, or attempted to deal with, the conflict; and, what negative and positive effects they experienced as a result of the conflict.

In addition to the option of briefly describing an incident of conflict (Q12), there were three other qualitative questions (i.e., Q24, Q27 and Q28). In Q24 respondents were asked to provide additional information that would give better insight into how they, their families, and their ministries were affected by the incident of conflict. Q27 was directly

²⁴⁶ Hereafter, references to specific questions in the survey will be designated by "Q" followed with the number of the question. Thus, "Q10" refers to responses to question 10 of the survey. If the wording of the question is not set out in the text, that wording can be determined by referring to Appendix 'E'.

related to this Project's research question: "Comment on those factors that you found helpful or beneficial to you personally in responding to the conflict, in processing the conflict and resolving the conflict in respect to yourself, your family and your ministry. Enter 'No Comment' if you prefer to not provide any answer." This question did not specifically refer to spiritual formation, or a comparable term. The survey neither directed nor limited the respondents in references to, or descriptions of, spiritual formation. As will be explained later, the responses were reviewed to determine if language was used that indicated some experience of spiritual formation.

The concluding question (Q28) provided a reflective opportunity for the respondents: "In retrospect, what (if anything), would you have done differently?" It was anticipated that some of the respondents would indicate areas in which they may have failed, responded badly or inappropriately, and the like. This opportunity for self-reflection may reveal crucial factors identified for those who experienced growth or otherwise benefited through the conflict.

At the conclusion of the survey the respondent was prompted to "submit form" to finalize his or her answers. Each respondent that submitted answers was assigned a number; there was no information that identified that respondent unless it was specifically included within the answers by the respondent. When the survey answers were submitted by a respondent, that link was severed and a separate link was opened that invited the respondent to request a summary of the findings of the survey by providing an e-mail address.

Before the on-line survey was made available to the participating denominations and their congregational leaders, it was tested. On or about December 10, 2010, Lorne Hunter, Director of Research for OC, forwarded an e-mail to people with experience in

congregational leadership within, or related to, OC. The form of this letter is attached as Appendix 'F'. Those people were invited to complete and assess the survey as to such things as its length, logical progression, appropriateness of content, and the technical performance of the computerized features. Approximately twenty people tested the survey. A number of technical difficulties were identified and corrected. The substantive responses to the survey were favourable and encouraging, and the text of the survey was posted on-line.

D. Assessment of the Project and Research Instrument

This section reflects upon the relative benefits and limitations of this Project and the survey. It will briefly consider its delimitations, limitations, independent and dependent variables, credibility, margin of error, and transferability.

Delimitations

Reference has already been made to delimitations of this Project and the research instrument. As earlier pointed out, the target group of the research question are leaders of Canadian evangelical English-speaking congregations who had experienced conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations. Further, those congregational leaders invited to participate in this research were currently serving with one of the six participating denominations. These constraints were chosen for a number of reasons. One reason was that the identified sample included a sufficiently large and diverse cross-section of congregational leaders within Canada, although it did not include leaders of non-evangelical or non-English speaking congregations. A collateral reason was that this delimited group minimized the potential impact of variables that probably have considerable influence upon an

understanding of, and responses to, conflict. Two such variables are diverse theological doctrines and practices, and diverse cultural perspectives and practices.

Limitations

There are numerous limitations of the data provided by responses to the survey. First, the survey was self-reporting. The self-reporting nature of the survey did not provide a method of independently assessing the accuracy and completeness of the responses. To some extent the potential impact of this limitation was presumed to be diminished on the basis that participation in the survey was both anonymous and voluntary. Second, the survey data was collected at one point in time. This limitation meant that there was no opportunity to assess such things as a respondent's mood, recollection, change or development in circumstances, and time constraints. However, the survey was open for participation for more than one month which, presumably, enabled potential respondents to choose a favourable time and place to complete the survey.

Variables

As this was a descriptive study, no variables were controlled. However, both independent and dependent variables can be discerned in the survey responses. In this Project, the presence of one or more of the eight identified factors in the life of a leader experiencing conflict were independent variables that were claimed as having contributed to that leader's spiritual formation, which is a dependent variable.

More generally, a collateral inquiry was made to detect variables that may have indicated a greater or lesser incidence of conflict directed at leaders from within their congregations. For example, as data from the survey was filtered and compared with the

unfiltered data, was it possible to observe whether matters such as a leader's gender, age, length of service, or denominational affiliation (i.e., independent variables) showed a greater or lesser incidence of conflict directed at a leader (i.e., dependent variable)? Even more generally, did a comparison of data from this Project with the CTI Report (i.e., independent variables) identify similarities or dissimilarities in the experiences of conflict directed against leaders in Canada and the United States (i.e., dependent variables)?

Credibility

On the issue of credibility it is noted that the e-mails inviting congregational leaders to participate in the on-line survey were sent by each denomination directly to the current e-mail address of each of its pastors and other leaders of English-speaking congregations. As mentioned earlier, participation was voluntary and anonymous. There was no compensation for participating in the survey. All data was collected, and has been retained, by a well-known and trustworthy organization (i.e., Outreach Canada). Taken together, it is believed that these elements communicate a high degree of credibility.

There were 496 participants who provided useable responses to the survey. The following chart 4.1 sets out each denomination's number of English-speaking congregations, pastors/leaders and completed surveys, respectively.

Chart 4-1: Particulars of Participating Denominations

Denomination	Congregations	Pastors/leaders²⁴⁷	Responses
BGCC	99	151 (153)	16
CCMBC	226	466 ²⁴⁸	45
CMAC	269	551 (574)	93
EFCC	119	142 (150)	43
FEBC ²⁴⁹	360	619 (634)	84
PAOC	715	1,596 (1,682)	204
Other or none ²⁵⁰	N/A	11	11
Totals:	1,788	3,536	496

Margin of Error

The maximum margin of error determined for this data is plus or minus 4.08%, 19 times out of 20.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ This is the number of pastors/leaders of English-speaking congregations who received the e-mail invitation to participate in the on-line survey. The number in parenthesis is the total number of pastors/leaders of English-speaking congregations at the time of the survey. Reasons for non-receipt of the e-mail invitation include lack of e-mail service in some rural areas and out-of-date e-mail addresses.

²⁴⁸ CCMBC reported 466 current pastors for English-speaking congregations (427 paid and 39 unpaid). However, 496 current pastors of the denomination received the e-mail invitation to participate in this on-line survey, of whom 211 were reported to have opened the e-mail. As this survey was specifically directed to pastors/leaders of English-speaking congregations it has been presumed that the number of qualifying potential respondents was the reported 466.

²⁴⁹ FEBC participated in three of its five national regions: Pacific Region (85 English-speaking congregations with 130 pastors and other leaders receiving the e-mail invitation); Central (256 congregations with 462 pastors); and, Atlantic (19 congregations with 27 pastors).

²⁵⁰ There were 11 respondents who reported that they had no denominational affiliation, or that they had an affiliation other than the six denominations participating in this survey. There was no explanation as to how they received or responded to the invitation to participate in the survey. As respondents received the invitation from one of the six participating denominations, either directly or indirectly, the responses of these 11 respondents have been included on the presumption that they are congregational leaders of Canadian English-speaking evangelical congregations.

²⁵¹ Calculation of this margin of error was determined after consultation with Lorne Hunter, Research Director of Outreach Canada, and use of the “Margin of Error Calculator” of the American Research Group, Inc. which can be accessed at <http://www.americanresearchgroup.com/moe.html>. This margin of error was confirmed by the use of a similar calculator made available by DSS Research at

Based upon the method by which the data was collected, the size of the sample and the margin of error, and subject to the limitations stated earlier, it is believed that the responses to the survey are credible.

Transferability

Are the data and findings of this research transferrable to wider and more diverse settings? Given the nature and dynamic of both leadership and conflict, it is proposed that there are a multitude of situations to which the findings of this research may be applied. This is consistent with this author's position that the principles regarding conflict, leadership and spiritual formation that have been discerned from the Bible, are of universal application within their intended context and as properly understood. The extent and effectiveness of the transferability of this research would, of course, require confirmation from further specific research.

In retrospect, there are additional questions that could have been included in the survey, and existing questions that could have been framed differently. However, in conclusion, it is submitted that the research instrument used in this Project has been, and is, a valid, probative and useful method of gathering data regarding the matters of conflict, leadership and spiritual formation relevant to this Project's research question and collateral issues.

<http://www.dssresearch.com/KnowledgeCenter/toolkitcalculators/sampleerrorcalculators.aspx> which resulted in a margin of error of plus or minus 4.1%, 19 times out of 20.

E. Data and Findings

This section will report on data received from the survey respondents and propose findings based upon that data. In particular, three inquiries will be considered, moving from the most general to the most specific.

First, this section will consider the broad presumptive issue of whether the experiences of conflict, and responses to conflict, against congregational leaders are more or less similar in the Canadian and American contexts. Second, it will seek to discern variables in the lives and situations of congregational leaders that accompany a greater or lesser incidence of conflict directed at them from their congregations. As indicated earlier, insights into these issues provide needed context and direction for a better understanding of the nature and dynamic of conflict directed personally at congregational leaders, and how to address that conflict. The third, and most central, issue of this research is the identification and assessment of critical factors that congregational leaders claim have contributed to their own spiritual formation.

Comparison of Canadian and American Experiences of Conflict

This sub-section briefly sets forth a limited comparison between several findings from the CTI Report and this Project. The purpose for this comparison is to identify whether there are similarities and dissimilarities between these two bodies of research regarding conflict directed at congregational leaders and, if so, in what areas and to what extent. The results will suggest one of two things. On one hand, if the comparison indicates a high degree of similarity between the experiences of congregational leaders in both countries, then it confirms the apparent presumption to that effect. This apparent presumption is reflected in

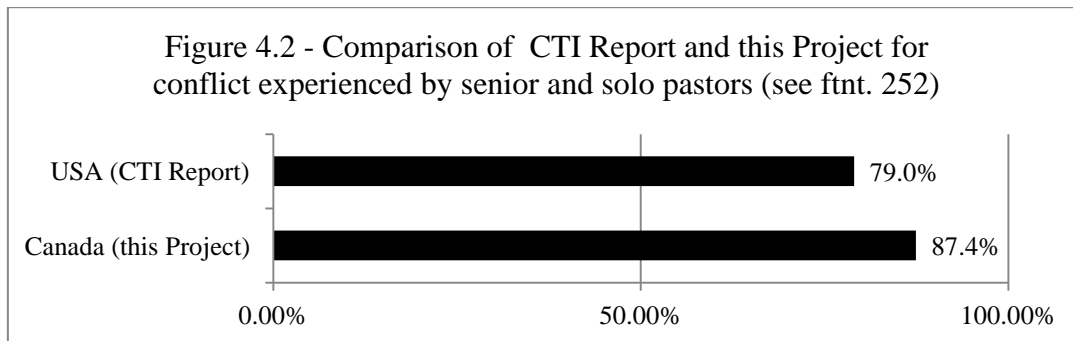
the observation that virtually all of the current evangelical resources that have been considered for this Project have been produced by individuals or institutions in the USA. On the other hand, if the comparison indicates some degree of dissimilarity then future research should critically consider the nature of that dissimilarity and its impact upon the way Canadian congregational leaders understand and deal with conflict, particularly conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation.

This sub-section summarizes some of the findings and conclusions respecting this issue. A fuller analysis of the matters considered here is set out in Appendix 'G'. Appendix 'G' also refers to several characteristics of the populations upon which the two studies are based that may contribute to differences in their respective findings.

Making comparisons between the American and Canadian experiences of conflict directed at congregational leaders was neither the purpose of the CTI Report nor the primary purpose of this Project. However, some of the data drawn from this Project facilitate comparisons with data from the CTI Report. On this basis, some cautious conclusions may be proposed regarding comparative experiences of conflict reported by Canadian and American congregational leaders.

There are sufficient comparable data to indicate that many of the American and Canadian experiences are relatively similar, particularly in the matter of conflict directed at congregational leaders. However, as indicated in Appendix 'G', the data indicate some potentially significant dissimilarities. Three of these dissimilarities are noted here. First, as set forth in figure 4.2, the incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders (i.e., senior

and solo pastors)²⁵² in Canada is higher [87.4% vs. (79%)].²⁵³ This type of conflict also is current in the lives of Canadian congregational leaders [23.2% (13%)].



Second, although the three leading reported causes of conflict directed at congregational leaders are the same in Canada and the USA, they differ in weight: (1) control issues at 76.0% (67%); (2) leadership style at 50.9% (57%); and, (3) vision/direction of the church at 42.5% (52%). Control issues as a cause of conflict appear more significant in Canada, and leadership style and vision of the church less significant.

Third, the manner in which Canadian congregational leaders deal with, or attempt to deal with, conflict directed at them appears to be different from those in the USA. In Canada there seems to be a higher rate of dealing directly with an antagonist,²⁵⁴ and a lower incidence of resorting to formal public forums.

Although these observations and conclusions are subject to further research and analysis, they do suggest that the experiences of congregational leaders in Canada and the

²⁵² Senior and solo pastors made up 97% of the sample for the CTI Report with the remaining 3% designated as “others.” It should also be noted that these statistics refer to those who are currently senior or solo pastors, which may not be the same as their positions at the time the conflict occurred. For purposes of this figure, the sample for this Project was limited to senior and solo pastors with service of more than six years.

²⁵³ When findings are compared, the statistic for the CTI Report will be stated in italics bounded by parentheses and will usually follow immediately after the corresponding statistic from this Project.

²⁵⁴ It is noted that the survey in this Project offered a response of “directly with the other person or group in the conflict,” whereas the CTI Report did not offer this option, but did offer less specific responses such as “informal/behind the scene process” and “other.” For this reason, a clear and direct comparison of data between the two sets of data is not possible.

USA are probably different in some important ways. Research published in 2004 by Donald Posterski and Andrew Grenville “revealed distinct differences between the Canadian and American way of Christian life.”²⁵⁵ Based upon a comparison of the data from this Project with the CTI Report, one area of difference is conflict: in particular, what causes conflict against Canadian and American congregational leaders, and how those leaders respond to, and process that conflict. Therefore, it should not be presumed that the Canadian and American experiences in Christian congregational conflict are the same. This includes conflict directed at congregational leaders from within their congregations.

Posterski and Grenville conclude that:

Canadians often look to America for models of effective ministry.... We think they have the answers. We forget the questions may be different. Given the clear differences between the faith experiences of the two countries, it is clear the challenge of encouraging Canadians to integrate Church and faith demands a ‘made in Canada’ solution. The challenges are here. So are the solutions.²⁵⁶

It is suggested that this brief comparison between the experiences of conflict against congregational leaders in the USA and in Canada demonstrates some potentially significant differences between the two national experiences. The greater number of reported incidents of conflict directed at Canadian congregational leaders, as well as the continuing high casualty rate among those leaders due to conflict,²⁵⁷ should lead Canadian congregational leaders to consider whether there are other and better resources for dealing with the conflicts they experience. At least it should cause those leaders to pause before uncritically presuming

²⁵⁵ Donald Posterski and Andrew Grenville, “Like Thy Neighbour?” <http://www.christianity.ca/netcommunity/page.aspx?pid=2770> (accessed September 21, 2011).

²⁵⁶ Posterski and Greville, “Like Thy Neighbour?”

²⁵⁷ This was an important component of the statement of the problem examined in chapter one.

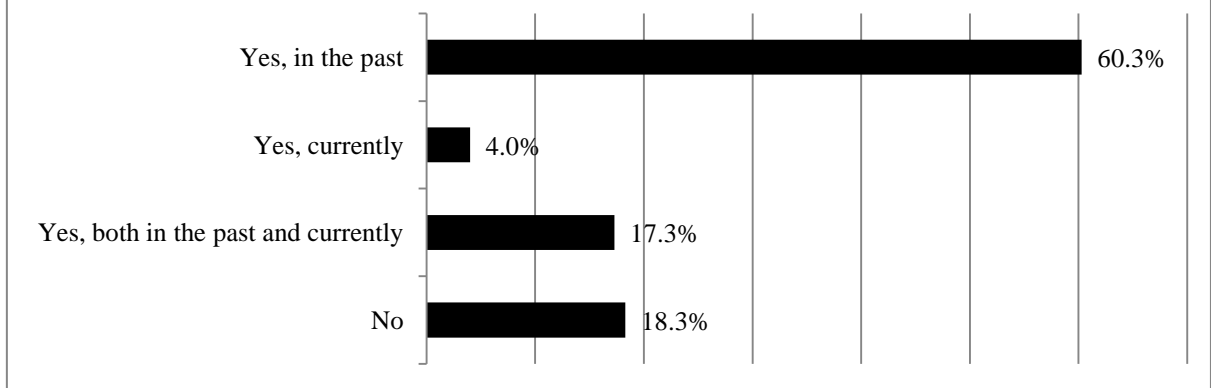
that an American approach to conflict provides all that Canadian congregational leaders need.

Variables Associated with Conflict

This sub-section is an abbreviated consideration of an analysis of reported variables as they may contribute to the incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders from within a congregation. Details of this analysis are more fully presented in Appendix ‘H’. These variables include a leader’s position, age, length of service, gender, and congregational size. It is proposed that insights gained from these observations will contribute to a better understanding of such things as when such conflict may be expected and why it happens. It is hoped that this information will demonstrate the need for congregational leaders to prepare for the event of conflict, and to be equipped to respond to it more competently and wholesomely.

For purposes of this analysis, the main focus will be upon variables as they relate to responses to question 10 (Q10) of the survey. Q10 asked: “At any time while you have served in a congregation in some leadership position, have you experienced conflict directed at you personally from within a congregation?” (underlining in survey). Following the format of the CTI Report, respondents selected one of four possible answers: “Yes, in the past,” “Yes, currently,” “Yes, both in the past and currently” (i.e., more than one occurrence, and at least one of these is current), or “No.” The percentage responses to each are shown in figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Experience of conflict directed against congregational leaders



Those congregational leaders who reported not having experienced conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation were 18.3% of respondents. Those who had experienced such conflict at some time were 81.7% of respondents. Of the respondents who had experienced such conflict, there were those who experienced it in the past (60.3%); were experiencing it currently (4.0%); and experienced multiple incidents both in the past and currently (17.3%). From this it is observed that 21.3% (i.e., 4.0% + 17.3%) of respondents were experiencing such a conflict at the time of the survey. Put another way, more than 4/5th of congregational leaders had experienced, or were experiencing, conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation, and more than 1/5th of congregational leaders were experiencing such conflict at the time of the survey. These are statistics for congregational leaders who have continued to serve as leaders. How many have not remained in congregational leadership because of such conflict?

It appears that the longer a congregational leader has served, the greater the probability of such conflict. The variable of length of service is frequently linked with a leader's age, although that will not necessarily be the case for those entering vocational ministry later as, say, a second "career." The positions of senior and solo pastors indicated

the highest incidence of a congregational leader's conflict coming from congregation. This could be attributed to the level or the function of a leader's role or position; however, it could also be a result of length of service, or other variables. Needless to say, the longer a leader's length of service, and the more prominent his or her position, the greater the likelihood of experiencing conflict personally from within the congregation.

An interesting anomaly was identified in those congregational leaders who were over 65 years of age, and who had served as leaders for over 21 years. Their reported incidence of conflict from a congregation was only 66.7%, and there was no conflict that was current. These statistics are significantly lower than might be expected. Is this the result of different leadership skills, or is it due to other factors?

Grace Chou proposes that older clergy are better at communicating, and receive a greater level of perceived legitimacy.²⁵⁸ However, in the survey, the age of the congregational leader at the time of an incident of conflict was not determined. Therefore, Chou's proposal could not be verified by the Project's data.

Edwin Friedman observed that "Over the last ten to fifteen years I have witnessed a tremendous increase in the collective reactivity of religious congregations to their ministers, irrespective of gender or belief."²⁵⁹ Friedman's comment suggests that there has been a societal or cultural shift in the treatment of congregational leaders since the early 1980s, a shift that has brought an increase in conflict directed at congregational leaders from within their congregations.

²⁵⁸ Hui-Tzu Grace Chou, "The Impact of Congregational Characteristics on Conflict-Related Exit," *Sociology of Religion* 69 (2008): 103.

²⁵⁹ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Seabury, 2007). Friedman died in 1996 before completing *A Failure of Nerve*. Therefore, the period to which he refers is from approximately 1980.

In any event, the lower reported incidence of conflict experienced by this group of older, long-serving, congregational leaders intimates that they may have valuable insights to provide younger and aspiring congregational leaders. Do they have different or better leadership skills, or have they observed a cultural shift in how they have been treated as congregational leaders, or are there other things that can be learned from them in the matter of conflict? Unfortunately, many of these older leaders opted not to respond to Q27 regarding the identification of those factors they found helpful or beneficial to them personally in responding to congregational conflict. To obtain reliable and helpful insights into the reasons for this lower incidence of conflict directed at these older congregational leaders further research will be required.

One other observation from this Project's data was the higher incidence of conflict directed at female leaders in more prominent positions of congregational leadership (i.e., senior and solo pastors). The data does not provide sufficient information to identify the reasons for this situation. Again, further research is needed for a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Overall, two general conclusions can be drawn from this brief analysis. First, the level of conflict directed at congregational leaders from a congregation is high, and is probably increasing. Second, for congregational leaders, it is not a question of "if" they will experience such conflict, but "when." As a result it is necessary for congregational leaders to prepare for the event of conflict, and to be equipped to respond to it more competently and wholesomely.

Factors Claimed as Beneficial in Conflict

The central issue of this Project surveying Canadian evangelical congregational leaders, who have experienced congregational conflict directed at them personally, is the identification of those factors that they claim have contributed to their own spiritual formation.

It is observed that not all respondents recognized benefits from their experiences of conflict. Q26 asked: “What positive effects of the conflict have you experienced?” Twelve respondents chose the response “no positive effects.” Some of the qualitative responses to Q24 and Q27 confirm that some respondents did not claim any benefit from the conflict. Some comments for those respondents include: “None. The event took its toll on me and my wife. Made going to the office/church hard and sometimes even preaching was difficult. I hated seeing the person” (3547)²⁶⁰; “there was nothing positive about it. The man was rude and regardless of whether I was a pastor or not, he had no right to treat me or my family with disrespect” (3473); “my wife was very hurt during the process. We looked at other careers as a result of this conflict and others” (3472). One is also left to wonder about the continuing wounds of leaders who made comments such as: “sometimes one has to walk away and not confront” (3439); and, “I have learned that denominational officials almost exclusively focus on ‘saving the church and sacrificing the pastor’” (3339).

As explained earlier, Q27 was designed to elicit descriptive responses that identified factors that assisted congregational leaders experiencing conflict. Q27 asked: “Comment on those factors that you found helpful or beneficial to you personally in responding to the

²⁶⁰ The four digit number in parentheses following a quotation is the identification number assigned to the particular respondent being quoted. In some cases, reference is included to a question (e.g., Q27) to more specifically locate a response in the data. Responses may have been edited for spelling, grammar or general readability, or to exclude details to further protect the anonymity of the respondent.

conflict, in processing the conflict and resolving the conflict in respect to yourself, your family and your ministry. Enter ‘No Comment’ if you prefer to not provide any answer.” As already pointed out, the wording of this question did not specifically refer to the spiritual formation of the congregational leader. However, it was decided that the wording of this question contained sufficient specifics to enable a respondent to report spiritual formation in his or her own language, without prompting, directing or limiting the response.

Among those who may not have reported any, or much, benefit from an experience of conflict were respondents who seemed to demonstrate a strong and innate resilience. Although the word “resilience” was not specifically used, elements of resilience appeared in descriptive phrases of what respondents did, or determined to do, in situations of conflict, such as: “personally I also believe I am wired in a way that allowed me to survive the conflict. God has made me a determined man who generally perseveres to the end of things (the shadow side of this is of course stubbornness)” (3560); “staying the course without defence or apology” (3601); “to work on what I could work on and release responsibility for the rest” (3594); “I think I have a much thicker skin with regard to when people criticize me” (3772); and, “sometimes, you just have to stick with something if you feel strongly that God is in it; even though the challenges can seem insurmountable” (3488).

The responses to Q27 were carefully read and coded according to the eight categories identified in chapters two and three. Summary descriptions for the eight categories are: (1) an existing intimacy with God; (2) a functioning biblical theology; (3) training for wholesome and competent behaviour; (4) practising spiritual disciplines; (5) being oriented to, or in, one’s call; (6) attending to emotional and mental health; (7) attending to physical health; and, (8) relating with others. For purpose of this analysis, the eighth category has

been divided into three distinct groups of “others.” The first group is designated as (8a), the “a” referring to the individual or group identified as the leader’s antagonist; second, is (8s), the “s” indicating others who were supportive to the leader, including the confessor-confidant; and third, is (8i), the “i” referring to intervention by a third party such as a mediator or arbitrator.

The purpose for this coding was to determine which of the eight categories were recognized and employed by the respondents, and to what extent. It has been acknowledged that these eight categories are inter-related. The coding endeavours to identify specific categories by separating elements of responses from each other for purposes of weighing the presence of each category. Thus for example, if a person simply indicated that he or she read the Bible, that probably showed the presence of category 3 (i.e., practising spiritual disciplines), however, if a person reported having spent time reading and meditating in the Scriptures with the particular purpose of developing his or her relationship with God, that was counted as a presence of category 3 and category 1 (i.e., developing one’s relationship with God). It is possible that a person stating that he or she read the Bible may not actually be practising the spiritual discipline of attentive reading of Scripture, or *lectio divina*, nevertheless, the benefit of the doubt was granted. In cases where a person indicated engagement in a hobby, consideration was given to the possible presence of factors of attending to emotional health, and attending to physical health. For example, if a person was engaged in stamp collecting this would be recognized as a (potential) mentally wholesome distraction without physical health benefits, thus category 6 only; engagement in, say, jogging when there was an actual or implied engagement in mental activity apart from the conflict would count for each of categories 6 and 7. Regarding the category of “others,” a

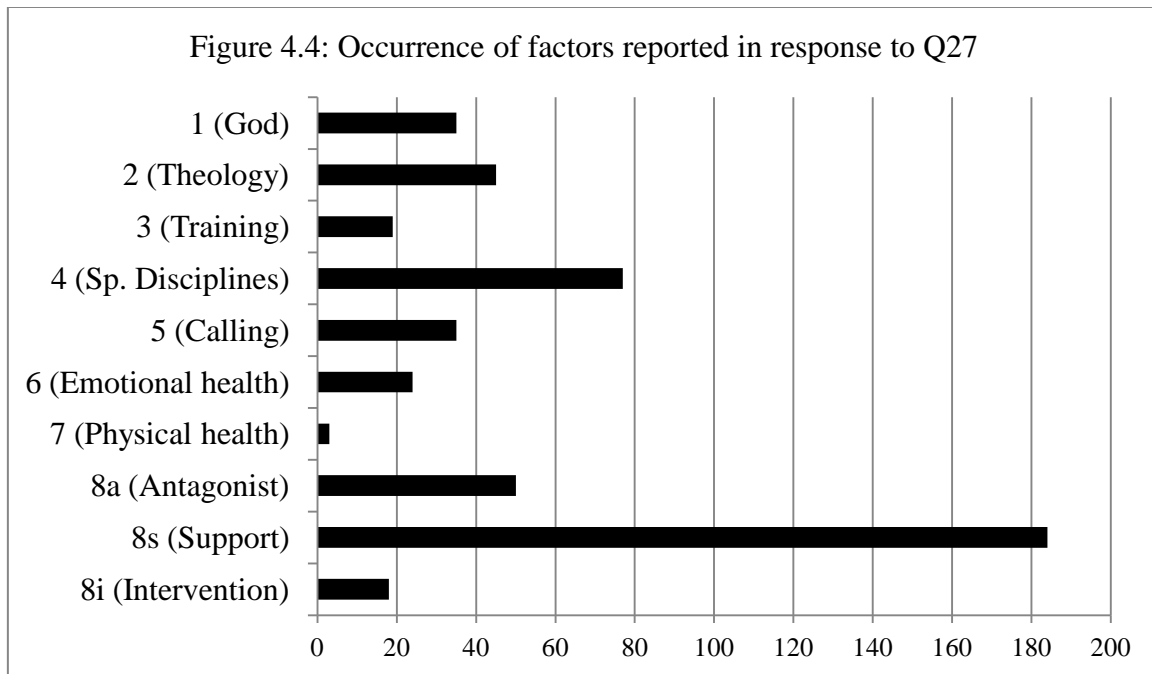
leader may have identified that he or she approached the antagonist seeking to reconcile, and found support in a family member and a good friend, and saw intervention by a denominational official, in which case there would be one point for “8a,” two for “8s,” and one for “8i.”

The responses to Q27 were also related to responses to other questions, particularly those inviting a qualitative reply. The other qualitative questions were Q12 (i.e., description of a significant conflict); Q24 (i.e., information as to how the conflict affected the leader, and his or her family, ministry and health); and, Q28 (i.e., in retrospect, what would you have done differently).

Corroboration of qualitative answers is, to some extent, provided from quantitative replies. For instance, a description of the affects of an identified experience of conflict (Q24) could be compared with answers to quantitative questions such as Q22, Q25 and Q26.

Of the 405 respondents who reported at least one experience of conflict directed at them personally as congregational leaders from within a congregation, 339 (83.7%) provided substantive responses to Q27. The remaining 66 respondents chose “no comment.” In all, the coding indicated 488 points for the eight categories. The results of coding the responses to Q27 are set out in figure 4.4.

As shown in figure 4.4, all eight of the categories were recognized and employed by the respondents, albeit in a relatively uneven manner. By far the most prevalent reported category was the support of others such as a spouse, family member, good friend, or confessor-confidant (i.e., “8s”). On the other hand, there were only three reports of attending to physical health.



The following are some insights provided by the respondents in the various categories. Some of the respondents' comments have been edited for typographical and grammatical inaccuracies, greater clarity, or further protection of anonymity. The four digit number in parentheses immediately following a quotation is the identification number for a respondent. This number is provided to enable reference to, and authentication of, a respondent's full responses.

The first category addresses how congregational leaders claimed that an existing intimacy with God had enabled them to wholesomely deal with, and perhaps grow in, an experience of conflict directed at them personally. Some of the general comments included references to "a deep and passionate relationship with Jesus Christ" (3313); and "my personal intimacy with the Lord was the source of my security and ability to continue ..." (3276).

Others were more specific in referring to this existing intimacy in terms of *toward* God, or *upon* God, or *from* God. Movements *toward* God were expressed in terms of what resulted from an incident of conflict: “[the conflict] led me deeper into an understanding of God” (3543); “going to God to teach me what to do” (3684); “one of the first things I do is to take the situation before the Lord” (3765); “I have looked to God to teach me in the midst of something negative” (3620); and, “my own pursuit of God in prayer” (3683). Leaders also commented that the conflict led them to rely more *upon* the Lord: “this conflict has helped me lean more heavily on the Lord” (3671); “taught me to lean into God” (3679); “made me lean on the Lord more” (3552, 3488); or simply, “I chose to trust Him” (3638). Others reported how they received something *from* God in their experience of conflict. Examples of this include comments such as “God manifested His grace in this situation” (3484); “I was blessed by the love and grace of God as I prayed through to the victory” (3479); “God’s enabling power and discernment through the conflict” (3469); and, “God has a way of working redemptively through people and events if we are open to see him at work, it takes time to see him working” (3367).

These comments are evidence that some degree of intimacy with God is a factor that enabled these leaders to deal with, and progress through, conflict. In addition, some of the respondents attested to being moved closer to God by an incident of conflict. The first may have contributed to spiritual formation; the second, evidenced spiritual formation.

Second, is the category of a leader’s core beliefs as reflected in his or her theology. A variety of statements indicated a functioning biblical theology among these leaders. In the realm of the identity of a follower of Jesus, one leader stated that the incident of conflict caused him “to refocus on ‘who I am in Christ’ and what He has created in me rather than

‘who people wanted me to be’” (3602). Another leader echoed a similar thought: “rebuilding my inner self worth by focusing on who I am in Christ” (3654).

God’s sovereignty was mentioned several times in different ways. In regard to a person’s defence and vindication in an experience of conflict as a congregational leader, one senses the painfulness of taking a stance that allowed the Lord to be the leader’s defender (cf., Moses in Numbers 12): “it was difficult I was reminded that truth always prevails ... I didn’t try defending myself ...” (3429); “the discovery of the support given to me by God. ... not responding directly but allowing God to handle it and others to step in for you” (3406); and, “I began to learn to leave my reputation with God. ... I can only leave these things with God and give myself to love and serve Him” (3328). Other indicators of a functioning theology of God’s sovereignty were in the areas of a leader’s future and the promise of needed help: “recognizing that God has another chapter beyond the here and now” (3644); and, “I knew He promised to help in every situation” (3483).

Other comments that reflected active core biblical beliefs included: “you grow most in the challenges of life so I have to have a belief that I will grow even if it doesn’t seem to be that fun at the time” (3542); a somewhat cynical comment touching on human depravity was “knowing that dealing with people is very predictable ... pretty much all are selfishly inclined ...” (3720); and, the matter of submission to proper authority was expressed as “... the importance to myself submitting to those in authority over me in ministry. Very freeing and ultimately brought a positive solution for the church at large” (3409).

These and other comments demonstrated the importance of leaders having a functioning biblical theology to deal with, and grow in, situations of conflict competently and wholesomely.

Third, is the category of training and education in areas that equip leaders to respond to, and deal with, conflict. In some ways, training for wholesome and competent behaviour in the event of conflict is like learning first aid in the event of a serious injury. The time to learn these skills is before a crisis if a person is to be well equipped to respond to the incident. Nevertheless, some of the respondents were motivated to learn skills in responding to conflict more wholesomely and competently after experiencing conflict. The subsequent acquisition of skills often helped provide re-orientation and recovery in leaders.

For a number of respondents, taking a structured course to learn about conflict resolution or conflict management was helpful in understanding and processing conflict already experienced as well as being better equipped for conflict in the future. In this regard, some of the comments included: “the positive factor was helping me to be clear on steps to resolve conflict” (3388); “investing in the leadership to be equipped in future conflict” (3684); and, “I took several conflict resolution courses both secular and from a seminary course” (3699).

Some comments indicated that help and re-orientation were found in reading texts on the subject. One such comment was “Robert Clinton’s materials on suffering and conflict and how leaders respond to it was very helpful. Shelley Trebesch’s study on biblical characters who have gone through conflict and suffering and how God used it in their lives was also very helpful to me in determining how best to respond ...” (3252).

Some of the respondents manifested some training in, or at least, awareness of, family systems theory. Responses specifically referred to family systems theory, while others implicitly described principles espoused by the theory. Examples of training and application of the theory were evidenced in an understanding that conflict was experienced because of a

role of leadership, or because a leader caused change: “the attack was to me in the office of pastor and not so much personally” (3572); “to depersonalize my role in the conflict was very helpful” (3594); “recognizing along the way that much of the attack was to me in the office of the pastor and not so much personally, even though it was couched that way” (3572); and, “understanding that change will bring conflict and that some people won’t like that” (3696).

A substantial number of respondents recognized that the experience of conflict revealed how ill-equipped they were to deal with conflict. As a result it prompted them to become better equipped so that they could deal with a future incident of conflict better, and help others with their conflicts. An example of a common statement was “[the conflict] forced me to learn conflict management skills” (3371). Others recognized that their experience of conflict equipped them to help others: “we are also in a better position to help other leaders with the same problems” (3448). As these types of experiences were after-the-fact realizations or implicit acknowledgments, rather than statements of intentional preparatory training, they were not counted for purposes of figure 4.4 (page 128).

At the least, comments related to this category demonstrate the benefit of training for wholesome and competent behaviour in dealing with, and progressing through, the experience of conflict directed personally against congregational leaders.

The fourth category of practising spiritual disciplines was the second largest category recognized and employed by respondents. A number of the responses referred to more than one spiritual discipline. One example combined *lectio divina* (i.e., divine reading), prayer, self-examination, confession and spiritual direction: “I search the Bible and ask, how am I failing to abide to God’s Word. Am I in conflict with God’s Word? In the case that I have

found myself in error I address this with God in prayer, share my failure with the involved party and ask for forgiveness. Where I have tried and tested my heart and find myself innocent, I gently try to confront the involved party with God's Word, preparing beforehand the Scripture passages, thinking through scenarios that may be presented and how I would respond to them. I always involve my wife. We try to work through the apparent conflicts together" (3765). Other expressions of intertwining various spiritual disciplines include: "time in the Bible, prayer, quiet space away from work/ministry ..." (3400); "prayer was really important Also, deliberately looking for passages of scripture that speak to the struggle and bring hope" (3751); "I sought to be patient, prayerful, listening" (3417); and, "The issue was taken to God repeatedly. In so doing, I asked God to show me if I was wrong, either in overall direction or in specific execution. A conscious attempt was made to not allow anger or unforgiveness to take root in our hearts" (3482).

Other respondents referred to the practice of a specific spiritual discipline in the context of their experience of conflict. Some mentioned prayer: "prayer" (3520); "this has forced me to go to my knees in prayer" (3703). Others engaged with Scripture: "as I read scripture, it also puts us in some pretty good company" (3638); "I still experience flash backs but I am greatly encouraged by scripture" (3671); "I found being saturated in scripture to be essential" (3669); and, "approaching the scriptures again to hear if God would have me act differently" (3326). Yet others alluded to discernment: "conflict involved strategy for proposed relocation – with two competing visions. Worked with elders and individuals to listen, and on basis of discussion find a path forward" (3779). Such discernment involved discerning between others' or one's own personal opinions and God's position, and choosing to live in God's position: "Setting aside of the personal opinions of others and seeking God's

approval only” (3422). In other cases, discernment led to self-examination, and where indicated, confession: “it is always good to re-examine yourself” (3736); “... to see if I am in error” (3732); and, to make public apology for a display of anger or other expression for which confession was made (3516).

Other spiritual disciplines mentioned were solitude and fasting: “spending time in solitude with God ... very helpful” (3314); “fasting was immensely important, though I wouldn’t necessarily have known that beforehand” (3678); and, “[the conflict] ... forcing me into prayer and fasting” (3407).

The depth of many of these comments, and the frequency of the references to spiritual disciplines, attest to the importance of practising spiritual disciplines, particularly in times when leaders are experiencing conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations.

Fifth, is the category of a leader’s intentional reflection upon his or her call, or perhaps more accurately, his or her purpose. As indicated in a previous chapter, a leader’s defined purpose is likened to a ship’s compass at sea²⁶¹ – it provides orientation and direction. In terms of the lives of Moses, David, Jeremiah and Paul, this awareness of call or purpose is grounded upon God’s commissioning of a congregational leader that provides both orientation and direction in times of conflict.

One respondent asked himself a basic question: “am I a hireling or a shepherd?” (3776). Other more specific comments in this category were: “a deep sense of call from God that this is where I was to be and that me leaving would likely leave the cycle of dysfunction and conflict to repeat again, motivated me to stay and endure” (3560); “I was secure in my

²⁶¹ Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1994), 274.

calling and not too worried about what people thought of me” (3545); “the one thing that kept me going ... was God’s call on my life to the ministry, and the knowledge that one day I will have to give an account to the Saviour of leading the flock that He had entrusted to my care” (3715); “strong confidence in God’s calling to pastoral leadership” (3469); “my purpose in Christ ... I have not been called to satisfy all but to minister to all” (3464; also 3267). One female respondent stated, “I discovered that my calling wasn’t found in what people would think, but in what God had called me to do. Being a woman in ministry makes it a lot easier in this context now ...” (3480).

As some revisited their sense of purpose, they discovered new direction. Two comments serve to illustrate this point: “(this) conflict involved strategy for proposed relocation – with two competing visions. Worked with elders and individuals to listen, and on basis of discussion (found) a path forward” (3779); and, “the conflict was horrible but it did allow a move in a new direction. So in retrospect I can see some benefit” (3382).

Respondents who referred to their call or purpose frequently demonstrated a sense of being oriented and directed in situations of conflict directed at them personally.

The sixth and seventh categories are leaders attending to their emotional and physical health, respectively. It is useful to hear some of these leaders comment on the deep impact of conflict upon their emotional and physical health, as well as discern the frequent connection made between declining physical health and emotional health.

Q24 invited leaders to provide “... additional information that may give a better insight into how you were affected by the conflict. This may include any impact upon you, your spouse and other family members, your friends (both within and outside the congregation), your health, ministry focus, and the like.” In response to this question

numerous respondents reported that the experience of conflict had a direct effect upon their own and their family members' physical and emotional health. Frequently, the negative impacts upon emotional and physical health were linked.

Some examples of general statements regarding health included: "as a result, it affected my health, my emotions and put great stress on me and my family" (3463); "my health was impacted with stressed related symptoms" (3357); "my health broke down after almost one year due to stress, and I resigned" (3339); "I went into a depression. My health suffered, I hated my job and going to the office" (3726); "this had a profound effect on me spiritually, emotionally, physically and relationally. It hurt my spouse, children.... My health eventually gave out necessitating a year sabbatical where I sought counsel and renewal from outside the 'Christian' network because I had no trust in Christians" (3698); and, "on a personal level, this has caused me great anxiety and has affected my health" (3630).

Some respondents provided more detailed symptoms related to conflict. Such descriptions included: "the original breakdown was five years ago. I am doing well but am still in the process of recovering" (3745); "my stomach was in knots. Sleeplessness. I began to have serious bowel problems leading me to the doctor's office. My wife was very distraught, worried and found it difficult to face people" (3765); "health issues were huge. Weight gain, stress eating, instant anger, which has never been my personality" (3451); "my health was not affected long term but certainly issues like sleep, appetite and concentration in the short term" (3347); "my health went terribly – cold, shaking, heart pounding in my chest for days, felt extremely anxious ..." (3752); "the long term affect of this conflict ... led to a breakdown in depression which resulted in 6 months of leave" (3745); and, "my health began

to go downhill and within a month and a half I was diagnosed with burn out and ended up taking one year off to recover” (3707).

These comments recognize that the effect of conflict upon emotional and physical health of leaders and their family members should not be underestimated or ignored. It is submitted that attending to emotional and physical health is an important factor to dealing with, and growing in, experiences of conflict directed personally at congregational leaders. Additional attention is now given to the specific areas of emotional health and physical health.

The sixth category is attending to the mental and emotional health of congregational leaders experiencing conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation. As indicated in chapter two, leaders who experience conflict directed at them from within a congregation should “expect uncomfortable emotions”²⁶² including anger, betrayal, bitterness, shock, defensiveness, being overwhelmed, apathy and depression.²⁶³ Emotional and mental distress related to conflict is a reality. The emotional toll on a leader in conflict is reflected in this comment: “The enemy used this conflict to really bury me emotionally. I slept little and could not stop thinking about it” (3427).

Numerous responses related how leaders sought professional medical, psychiatric and psychological treatment in regard to emotional and mental difficulties related to experiences of conflict. Examples of responses of this nature include: “a great psychiatrist” (3745); “I went for counselling for a few sessions, which was helpful” (3402); “I sought help from some professionals who help me put things into perspective” (3726); and, “I have been undergoing counselling and coaching to restore a positive view of God, myself, the church

²⁶² Rodney Crowell, “Spiritual Survival for a Forced Exit,” *Leadership* 10/1 (1989): 28.

²⁶³ Responses to Q25 of this Project’s survey, as well as the CTI Report, 15.

and ministry” (2603). Others also found great benefit in relationships with others, a category that will be dealt with later (i.e., “8s”). One example of the comfort, support and benefit of closeness to others is reflected in the comment that “healthy relationships at home provided me comfort and proper perspective” (3316).

In the right circumstances, being able to relate a leader’s story to another person, even to an antagonist, had a cathartic benefit for the leader. A few comments that appear to indicate this kind of emotional relief are: “I immediately wrote out a six page response to the situation which I submitted to the Board at my last meeting with them. This was cathartic but I should have kept it to myself ...” (3782); “as they began to listen and ‘really’ hear my concerns, my stress level dropped dramatically, and I no longer felt like I was working in isolation” (3534); and, “I confronted the pastor for what he had done to me. This was helpful even when the pastor didn’t care” (3645). One respondent related the cathartic benefit of working through this Project’s survey. Part of his response was that he “wasn’t aware of the negative baggage that still lingers” (3278).

For some respondents a wholesome diversion in an activity, with or without other people, had beneficial emotional and mental results. Comments along this line include: “working at the daily chores of ministry and preparing sermons prevented my mind from being overwhelmed by worry” (3635); “prayer and friendship outside the church and hobbies” (3450); and, another writes about “time spent refurbishing an old motorcycle” (3745).

Some respondents related that the passage of time, sometimes coupled with different ministry situations, was a definite catalyst for mental and emotional recovery. Some comments to this effect include: “I could not have filled out this survey five years ago.

Healing takes time” (3282); “time has softened the initial sense of betrayal” (3274); “after resigning, time away to gain perspective and spending a year as an interim where I was newly appreciated, where the investment in a particular congregation wasn't as deep, and where I was free to speak my mind and heart without concern for long-term continuation was very healing” (3367); “I had about a year ‘off’ after I left the church to heal and process what happened” (3626); and, “our time away from an official pastoral position was also helpful – reminding me I did want to pastor again, and give us space to both grieve the past situation and to look forward to a new one” (3381).

Perhaps one comment sums up this category of leaders attending to their emotional and mental health: “I’ve learned ... the importance of taking care of my emotional health in regards to dealing with conflict” (3540).

The seventh category is attending to the physical health of congregational leaders experiencing conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation. As indicated earlier, numerous respondents resorted to medical attention regarding physical and mental symptoms accompanying conflict. In light of the earlier comments about the significant negative impact of conflict upon the physical health of leaders, it is somewhat surprising how little attention appears to be given to the body or physical activity in dealing with incidents of conflict.

Apart from the reports of recourse to medical attention, only three specific references were made to the body, or physical activity, by respondents. These comments were: “my practice of running helped me sleep at nights even though my thoughts were often troubled” (3635 Q27); “regular walks and prayer times in which God strengthened my own spirit” (3786 Q27); and “I determined to get into good physical shape so as not to have health

problems. I walked a lot and prayed much” (3479 Q24). The respondent who referred to a hobby of rebuilding an old motorcycle could also be an example of an activity providing both healthy mental and (limited) physical expressions (3745).

Attention is now given to the eighth category of relationships with other people in the experience of conflict. As indicated earlier, this category has been further broken down into three sub-categories: relationships (1) with or towards an antagonist, whether an individual or group, is designated as “8a” in figure 4.4 (page 128); (2) with others who the leader found supportive is designated as “8s”; and, (3) with a third party who intervened in a situation of conflict is designated as “8i.” These sub-categories imply the importance of community for the congregational leader.

First, as discussed in chapter two, there are a variety of antagonists ranging from well-intentioned, to difficult, to “pathological”²⁶⁴ or “clergy killers.”²⁶⁵ Another type of antagonists (who, perhaps, should be more accurately categorized as supportive, or a confessor-confidant) may also include those who properly and necessarily confront a leader. An example of such a person is the prophet Nathan in his confrontation of David (2 Sam. 12). Some respondents pointed out that this latter type of confrontation with an antagonist should cause the leader to undertake self-examination, and if necessary, repentance and confession towards a party he or she may have offended. A response of this kind also reflects the practice of the spiritual disciplines of self-examination and confession with the goal of rebuilding a damaged or broken relationship with another person.

²⁶⁴ Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 35-57.

²⁶⁵ Lloyd G. Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

Relating directly with an antagonist is no easy task. Yet it is encouraged, if not required, within the Christian community by Scripture, and therefore particularly for those who are congregational leaders (e.g., Matt. 18: 15-35). Q23 asked: “How did you deal with, or attempt to deal with, the conflict? (Select all that apply).” The most frequent response was “directly with the other person or group in the conflict,” which was selected by 78.5% of respondents. The next most common response (37.3%) was “informal or behind the scene process.”

Some of the comments of leaders expressing their experiences of dealing directly with their antagonists included: “communicated directly with the person with the complaint. Agreed to disagree. Followed up with relationship building and was well received” (3718); “honest and direct communications with affected parties (Matt. 18)” (3250); “finding out what I had done/not done and asking forgiveness where I had failed helped tremendously. It did not relieve the conflict but I knew I had done as much as I was able to be at peace with my brother” (3462); and, “... when I did finally, six months after the conflict take the encouragement of this wise leader and the prompting of the Holy Spirit to approach the person with whom I had the conflict the meeting went better than one could expect or hope for. This individual shared how they had been feeling responsible and burdened over how they had spoken to me and attacked my character. Reconciliation and healing began that day and has continued” (3376). In some cases, involvement by wider spheres of the congregation was necessary as evidenced by this comment: “... leadership was thorough, patient, and restorative in their approach. This enabled us to keep our opinions in check and to be led by the Holy Spirit. When it came time to remove the individuals from ministry positions, I felt it necessary that the board be unanimous. Over the course of six to eight meetings, there were

a couple of gentlemen who wanted to try ‘one more time’ – either by speaking with them or writing them a letter. We went the extra mile until each board member was at peace that we had done all that we could. This was especially important as these men had been there long before me and would still be there after I had left. Once everyone was at peace with the fact that we had done all that we could, we moved on the matter with a common peace and resolve” (3438); and, “the experience taught me about the power of confrontation when done correctly and with the support of other team members/board members. The church was actually freed from the control of an individual and placed into the hands of the leadership team/congregation” (3442).

Not all approaches by leaders to their antagonists were successful, but many were. The quantitative (i.e., Q23) and qualitative responses (i.e., Q24, Q27, Q28) indicated that the biblical process of directly approaching one’s antagonist was taken seriously in many, if not most, cases.

Second, is the sub-category of “others” identified as supporters of the leader experiencing conflict. This group includes not only supporters, but also encouragers, allies, counsellors, mentors, spiritual directors and confessor-confidants. It is acknowledged that those in this sub-category may serve quite different functions. For instance, it is possible a supporter, encourager or ally enables a leader experiencing conflict to remain unchanged, rather than to grow, or if necessary, repent (e.g., 3754; 3686; 3685; 3674; 3659). The basic common denominator of this sub-category is that these “others” were there “for” the leader in some way. A few comments that confirm this general view included: “denominational leadership and care for the church and for our family was critical, and a wonderful support to us. I can’t imagine how pastors and their families cope if there are not

outside/denominational supports for them to lean on in difficult times” (3568); “having supportive relationships, both within and outside of the church, were incredibly important. Had I not had these, I cannot imagine hanging in through literally years of conflict” (3560); and, “it is so helpful to talk things out with a solid, trustworthy, mature Christian pastor or friend or spouse” (3751).

A recurring comment was the great value of the support and confidence of a leader’s spouse: “above all, my wife’s belief in me” (3449); “my husband ... very supportive” (3575); “my wife also offers a unique and often balancing perspective on life and ministry” (3400); “profound support from my wife” (3391); “... my wife was amazingly supportive in the midst of the conflict” (3381); “my supportive wife and children were invaluable” (3367); “most helpful was my spouse directly” (3316); and, “my wife was extremely supportive” (3329). A necessary counter-balance was also heard regarding the vulnerability of a leader’s spouse who is seldom directly involved, but almost always affected: “my wife has suffered through this and is disenchanted with ‘church’ and what it can do to her husband and to her personally. That has been tough” (3386); “my wife was very hurt during the process. We looked at other careers as a result of this conflict and others” (3472); “affected the whole family ... my wife is still hurt” (3552); and, “I am now more protective of self and family” (3362). These comments concerning a leader’s spouse could also be extended to include a leader’s children.

There are many references to other relationships in which the leader experiencing conflict found support, affirmation and encouragement. These other relationships included not only close family and friends, but also caring vocational colleagues, denominational officials and others: “it was encouraging to have the Board and Presbyter’s support” (3525);

“opening up to other pastors and being encouraged” (3520); and, “I was thankful for my supportive wife and family and very pleased with my Superintendent who had coffee with me on a regular basis ...” (3479). Although the preceding references to support may include being present, and standing, with the leader in crucial situations, there was a particular encouragement found by some respondents in those who not only supported “from the sidelines” but also stood with the leader “on the field.” Comments expressing this form of solidarity included: “a denominational team (district office) whose leadership provided sound counsel, encouraged me and stood with me through the ordeal” (3647); “I also consulted a mentor who we both trust and who had our back” (3533); “two friends and their families who stood by me and believed in me” (3742); and, “[a couple] championed me [and my ministry]. That was huge in helping me get through the [lengthy] process” (3462).

Support did not always mean agreement with the leader. On occasion the support was in the form of correction: “one elder in particular came alongside and helped me see my mistakes, own them and move on. He became a close helper to work on and deal with this process” (3572); “God used the painful truth of a consultant to show me my sin and to lead me to public repentance” (3295); and, “my district superintendent was a font of truthful (and at times painful) support” (3449).

In addition to correction there were “others” who had experience, and who listened and provided needed advice and direction. Perhaps the “others” in this group are most like the confessor-confidant spoken of in earlier chapters. Some examples of these “others” included: “the counsel of older pastors/semi-retired pastors who have been through the fray, who listened patiently, challenged gently and encouraged whole-heartedly” (3272); “my spiritual director really helped me navigate my way through things both internally and

externally” (3643); “it was helpful to try to work through the situation with the senior pastor (he was not the one I was in conflict with)” (3666); “having a ministry colleague who ‘believed in me’, and was available (and initiated as well) problem-solving conversation” (3786); “I also did go to my district supervisors for wisdom and support” (3484); “those with ... wise counsel have all been useful in discerning clearly the problem/conflict at hand, and appropriately navigating through the conflict to ideally reconciliation and at least mutual agreeable resolution” (3400); “encouragement and prayers of those outside of the situation who were able to see the bigger picture, and those who had experienced similar struggles” (3392); “hearing from older, trusted leaders in how to respond to the conflict was helpful” (3326); and, “what was most helpful for me was to talk and pray with church leaders aware of the situation, denominational superintendent, a pastoral counsellor/mentor, colleagues and an old friend ...” (3337).

The sub-category of “others” who were supportive (i.e., there “for” the leader) was the single greatest category recognized by leaders experiencing conflict directed at them personally. In many ways, this is evidence of a recognition of the benefits of community, as well as a wholesome antidote to Guy Greenfield’s observation that “Entirely too many wounded ministers are attempting to handle their pain alone.”²⁶⁶

Third, is a sub-category of “others” who intervened in the situation of conflict. Those in this group included third parties such as advisors, coaches, mediators and arbitrators trained in conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict transformation. These approaches serve to deal with a congregational problem (i.e., conflict resolution), or to provide a congregational process (i.e., conflict management), so that people can deal

²⁶⁶ Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister*, 220.

wholesomely with a situation of conflict. However, such processes do not necessarily address the wounds experienced by a leader, or establish conditions for spiritual formation in a leader, who is experiencing, or has experienced, conflict.

Some of the comments identified for this sub-category included: “district leadership intervened in a direct manner that has ‘settled’ the dispute in that we have been directed to let it go and focus on Kingdom work. This was very freeing” (2572); “we engaged an outside mediator who was extremely helpful” (3575); “church conflict resolution process protected all parties involved and allowed for resolution and reconciliation” (3557); “our elder board dealt with [the conflict]” (3492); “the intervention of friends of the person I was in conflict with” (3637); “the board/elders stepped up to the plate and dealt with the issue” (3760); “the district leader who intervened did an excellent job at bringing the problem to the forefront, talking with all involved and helping us come to a mutual agreement” (3774); “using the justice system to protect my family and leadership team from this person’s irrational behaviour” (3771); “conflict management counsellor – I needed an objective perspective and he helped with that” (3391); and, “the elders ... took control of the meetings to resolve the issue. Their presence, prayer, guidance, support, and maturity helped me avoid making the situation a bigger issue than it needed to be” (3321).

Another grouping of responses bears some relationship to intervention. This additional grouping included constitutional and procedural documents that laid out approaches and requirements in the event of conflict within a congregation. It is presumed that these documents sought to apply biblical principles regarding conflict. Respondents’ reports included statements such as: “local church constitution helpful in giving parameters

for church discipline” (3561); “our church’s policy was in place to support ...” (3555); or, “I engaged the stability of the constitutional procedures” (3417).

Although there is considerable value in theories and practices of conflict resolution and conflict management, discernment is needed to ensure that the techniques of such resolution and management are not automatically applied – other, more significant issues may be present, and the imposition of conflict resolution may be counterproductive or, at least, premature. One comment illustrates this point: “At one point, I now realize the Spirit was clearly telling me not to try to fix [the conflict], but my sense of ‘fixing the problem’ overruled the Spirit and it only made it worse” (3463).

It is proposed that this analysis of survey responses confirms, at least, that the eight identified factors are helpful and beneficial to congregational leaders personally in responding to, processing, and resolving conflict directed at them from within their congregations.

Factors Claimed as Beneficial in Conflict for Spiritual Formation

For this Project, one further issue remains to be addressed concerning congregational leaders who experienced conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations. The issue is whether that conflict was a crucible for spiritual formation in those leaders, and if so, what factors did those leaders recognize and employ that contributed to their own spiritual formation.

As indicated in chapter one, the definition for Christian spiritual formation adopted for this Project is: “the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”²⁶⁷

The data was again examined, with particular attention to the qualitative responses to Q24, Q27 and Q28. This review focussed on comments that indicated a congregational leader had experienced spiritual formation in and through conflict directed at him or her personally from within a congregation. Informed by Wilhoit’s definition, terms were identified in the responses that expressed a respondent’s positive movement in his or her relationship with God, or conformity to Christ. In some cases the overall tenor of the response was considered in categorizing a reply. Generally, the benefit of the doubt was granted in cases where there may have been some uncertainty, although in most cases there was a clear expression of positive movement, growth, development or formation in the person’s relationship with God, or conformity to Christ. On these bases, fifty-five respondents were identified as having indicated some measure of spiritual formation. Excerpts from the responses of each of these leaders are attached as Appendix ‘I’.

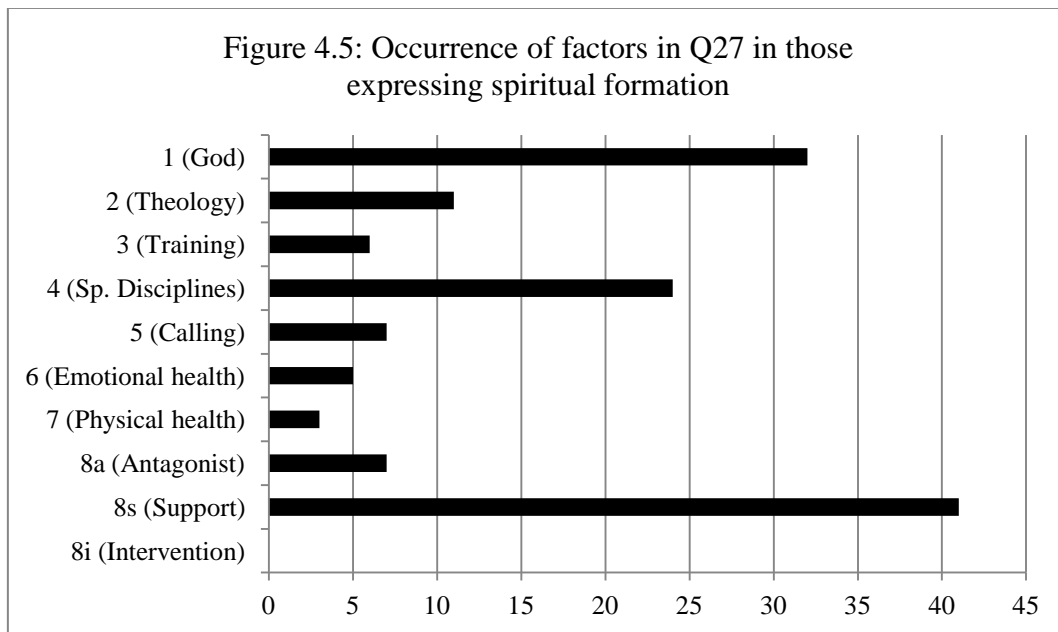
For purposes of identification, the fifty-five respondents who indicated a measure of spiritual formation will be referred to as the “Spiritual Formation Group” (i.e., “S-F Group”), and the remainder of the 339 respondents as the “Non-Spiritual Formation Group” (i.e., “Non S-F Group”).

The responses of these fifty-five respondents of the S-F Group to Q24, Q27 and Q28 were then reviewed again to determine the factors that those people claimed were personally employed in responding to the conflict, in processing the conflict, and resolving the conflict

²⁶⁷ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

with respect to themselves, their families and their ministries. It is proposed that the factors claimed by these respondents are related to their expression of having experienced some degree of spiritual formation. Many of these expressions were related to, or embedded within, category 1 comments (i.e., an existing intimacy with God).

As stated earlier in this chapter, 405 congregational leaders reported conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations, of whom 339 provided substantive responses to Q27. The fifty-five respondents identified as expressing some spiritual formation in or through the reported conflict accounts for 16.2% (i.e., 55/339) of these substantive responses. The results of coding the responses to Q27 according to the eight identified factors for the S-F Group are set out in figure 4.5.

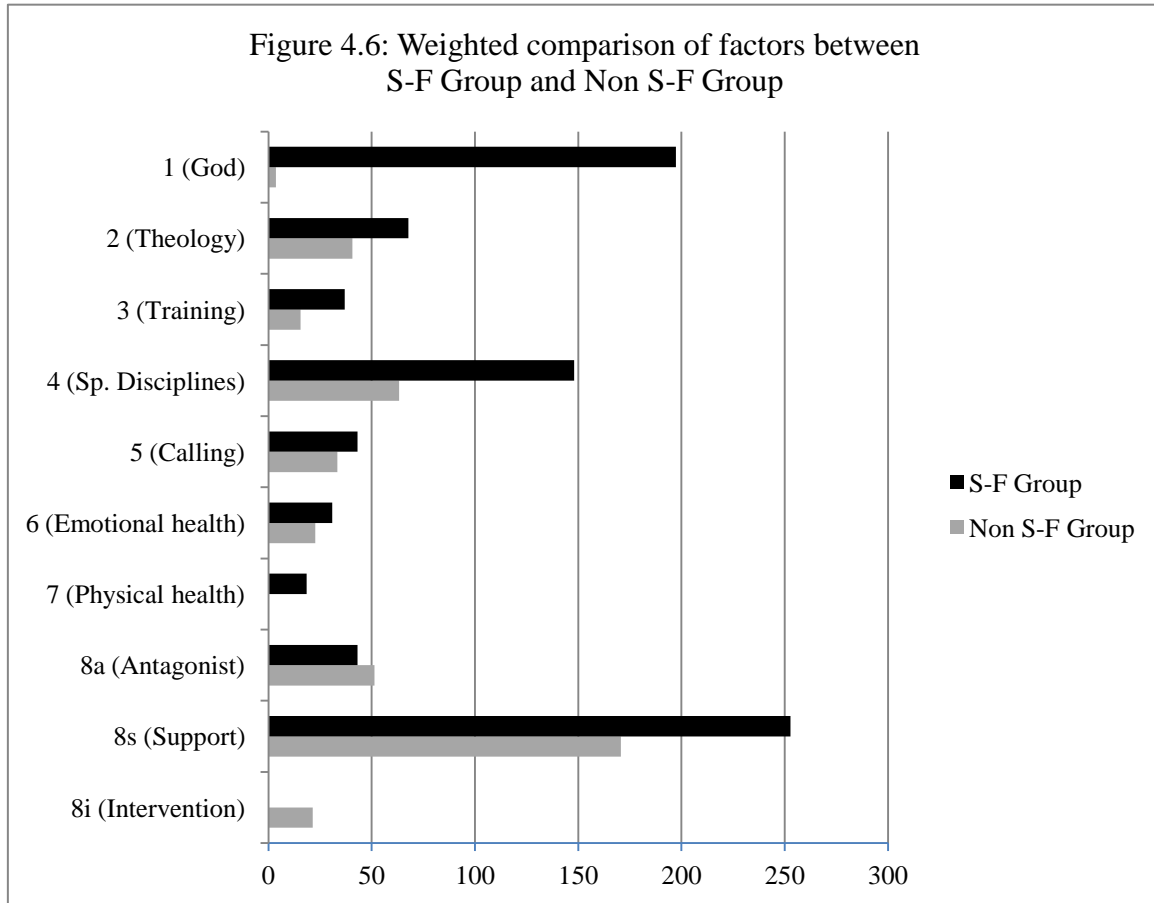


Some caution should be taken when reviewing this data. First, selection of the fifty-five respondents involved a degree of subjectivity in assessing the responses to determine terms expressing spiritual formation (viz., Appendix ‘I’). Second, it is possible that some respondents did experience spiritual formation but did not express that experience in

identifiable language in their responses. Third, there may be other variables that contributed to the identification of this “spiritual formation group” (i.e., S-F Group). One such variable appears to be the length of service of the members of the S-F Group – 87.3% having served for more than 11 years, and 61.8% for more than 21 years. Although these underlying concerns may limit reliance upon the precision of this statistical analysis, they do not detract from the emerging trend. That trend is that the S-F Group manifested some significant differences with the Non S-F Group regarding the recognition and employment of the eight identified factors.

A comparison between the occurrences of the eight identified factors in each of the S-F Group and the Non S-F Group is represented by figure 4.6. To present this comparison in a more meaningful way, the reported occurrences of the two groups have been weighted rather than simply using the absolute numbers for the two groups because of the disproportionate sizes of those two groups. For example, in absolute numbers, the factor of attending to emotional health (i.e., category 6) is 19 points for the Non S-F Group and 5 points for the S-F Group. The size of the Non S-F Group is 284, whereas the size of the S-F Group is 55. Providing proportionate weight to the responses results in 22.68 points for the Non S-F Group (i.e., $19 \times 339/284$), and in 30.83 points for the S-F Group (i.e., $5 \times 339/55$). In this way it can be seen that, overall, those in the S-F Group reported giving more attention

to emotional health than those in the Non S-F Group.



Significant differences between the S-F Group and the Non S-F Group appear in virtually every category. The three most notable differences occur in categories 1, 4 and 8s – that is, reported existing intimacy with God, practising spiritual disciplines, and relating to others who are supportive. From these observations, it appears that a leader’s expression of an intentional and intimate attention to his or her relationship with God is a strong indicator of the likelihood of spiritual formation. It is not surprising to see this coupled with reported practising of spiritual disciplines.

Although the highest reported factor of those experiencing conflict was relating to others who were supportive, the S-F Group reported an even higher relationship with others who were supportive. This suggests a higher value put upon community in the process of conflict, and in the process of spiritual formation. As with the Non S-F Group, the S-F Group often referred to the support of spouse, family and friends. The S-F Group also frequently specified others who were “godly counsellors,” “elders,” “pastors,” “godly men,” a “model,” “mentor,” a “counselling peer group,” “consultant,” and “psychiatrist.”

The S-F Group also reported measurably higher employment of categories 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 – that is, a functioning biblical theology, training in wholesome and competent behaviour, being oriented to one’s call, attending to emotional health and attending to physical health. The only two categories in which the Non S-F Group reported greater occurrences was in relating to antagonists (8a) and interveners (8i). None of those expressing spiritual formation reported a person or group who acted as an intervener in the conflict. The significance of some of these differences, and what they may mean for congregational leaders experiencing conflict, may be the subject of future research.

The data appears to support that a congregational leader is more likely to express the experience of spiritual formation in or through conflict the greater his or her recognition and employment of the identified eight factors.

F. Summary and Conclusion

The responses to the survey confirm the high incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders personally from within their congregations. The primary aim of this

Project is to identify those factors that contributed to spiritual formation in leaders who experienced conflict from within their congregations.

Two secondary issues are also material to the primary issue and the survey results: first, a comparison of the Canadian results of this Project with the results of the American CTI Report; and second, identification of variables that indicate a greater probability of the incidence of conflict directed at a congregational leader. As to the first of these issues, the analysis of the data suggests that, although there are significant similarities between the experience of conflict by congregational leaders in Canada and the USA, there are also some potentially significant dissimilarities. These dissimilarities should cause a more critical assessment of the presumption that American and Canadian responses to such conflict are the same. As to the second of these issues, there are a number of variables that indicate a higher possibility of conflict that will be directed at a congregational leader. In this regard, it appears that it is more a question of “when,” rather the “if,” a congregational leader will experience conflict personally from within a congregation.

In the matter of the primary issue, it appears that eight categories of factors have been identified that not only enabled congregational leaders to respond to conflict more wholesomely and competently, but also contributed to spiritual formation in congregational leaders who experienced conflict directed at them from within their congregations. These eight factors are summarized as: an existing intimacy with God; a functioning biblical theology; training for wholesome and competent behaviour; practising spiritual disciplines; being oriented to, or in, one’s call or purpose; attending to emotional and mental health; attending to physical health; and, relating to others (i.e., the community of those who are antagonists, supporters, and interveners).

When the responses are gleaned for language that expresses an experience of spiritual formation in or through the reported conflict, the reported employment of the eight factors increased. This analysis indicates that there is a correlation between a congregational leader's intentional employment of the eight factors and the likelihood of expressing spiritual formation in or through conflict directed at that leader from within a congregation.

What now remains is to present some of the findings and recommendations of this Project.

Chapter 5 - Findings and Recommendations

*Conflict is a powerful agent of change, able even to transform our identities.*²⁶⁸

This chapter will draw together various strands of this Project and present some of its findings and recommendations. As such, the current literature surveyed in chapter two, the theological and biblical foundations explored in chapter three, and the findings gathered and analyzed in chapter four, will be woven together in an attempt to provide useful recommendations to congregational leaders who have experienced, are experiencing, or will experience, conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations.

This chapter will be presented in four sections. The first section will set forth an evaluation and interpretation of the findings of this Project in light of the research question. Second, and what may appear to be a digression, will be a proposal that congregational leaders and others listen to the voices of other ages, traditions and cultures. It is argued that this section flows from the suggested dissimilarities between Canadian and American experiences of conflict, and flows toward a better appreciation for the significance and application of the eight identified factors. Third, is a brief overview of the eight identified factors that congregational leaders who have experienced conflict claim have contributed to their own spiritual formation. As to application of these factors, this section will be more generally suggestive than specifically prescriptive, pointing congregational leaders, educators and denominations in the general direction of health and competency, rather than dictating

²⁶⁸ Larry A. Dunn, "Transforming Identity in Conflict," in *Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation*, ed. Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler (Scottsdale, PA/ Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1999), 45.

particular methods or approaches. Fourth, are some provisional areas for further research related to the findings of this Project.

A. Evaluation and Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Research Question

This section will present some evaluations and interpretations of the findings in light of the research question. The findings will also be considered in relationship with existing research and studies, as well as theological concerns.

The research question is stated once again to provide orientation for evaluating and interpreting findings for this Project: “Among leaders of Canadian Evangelical congregations who have experienced congregational conflict directed at them personally, what critical factors do they claim have contributed to their own spiritual formation.” Three issues will be considered in this section – the high incidence of conflict against congregational leaders; a comparison of Canadian and American experiences of conflict against congregational leaders; and, the factors identified as contributing to spiritual formation in congregational leaders experiencing conflict.

First, the data collected in this Project confirms other studies that report a high incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders personally from within their own congregations. Overall, more than four out of five (81.7%) of the respondents in this Project reported the experience of such conflict. Among those who were currently serving as senior pastors or as solo pastors, and had served for six years or more, 87.4% – almost nine out of ten – indicated at least one experience of conflict directed at them personally. These are people that have continued to serve as congregational leaders. In many ways, this is a testimony to the resilience, or character of endurance, of these congregational leaders. The

question remains unanswered as to how many congregational leaders have simply walked away, or have been driven away, because of conflict and are no longer serving as leaders in congregations.

This high incidence of conflict leads to the general conclusion that, among congregational leaders, the issue is not “if” they will experience conflict directed at them from among those they lead, but “when.” It is therefore not only prudent, but necessary, to equip congregational leaders for conflict.

This high incidence of conflict, coupled with the large number of available resources on conflict theory in the congregational context, also suggest another concern. That concern is whether current resources utilized by Canadian evangelical congregational leaders are adequately addressing the causes of conflict, or the ability to respond wholesomely and competently to conflict. Of course, this may also indicate the possibility that congregational leaders are not availing themselves of the resources available.

Theologically, the occurrence of conflict directed at congregational leaders from their congregations is consistent with the narratives and teaching of the biblical characters considered in chapter three. The issue is whether modern congregational leaders are responding to such conflict in a manner consistent with the lives of those biblical characters examined in chapter 3.

Second, as the research question refers to the experiences of Canadian evangelical congregational leaders, a secondary consideration is raised. That issue is whether the experience of Canadian congregational leaders is the same or similar to their American counterparts, and if not, to what extent and in what ways the Canadian experience may be different. This comparison was facilitated by the CTI Report. As indicated in chapter four,

it is cautiously proposed that the experience of congregational leaders is, to some extent, different in the context of Canadian evangelical congregations. These differences include: (1) a higher rate of conflict directed at Canadian congregational leaders (i.e., 87.4% vs. (79%) for senior pastors and solo pastors); (2) control issues were a proportionately higher source of conflict against leaders in Canada; and, (3) it appeared that more Canadian leaders approached their antagonists, whereas more American leaders resorted to public process for conflict resolution. Again, this conclusion is cautious and invites further research and evaluation.

The suggestion of some dissimilarity between the experiences of Canadian and American evangelical congregational leaders is consistent with the findings of other studies such as “Like Thy Neighbour?” by Posterski and Grenville. Although there is much of value that can be learned from the American experiences and resources, two implications may be drawn from these alleged dissimilarities in Canada.

First, an implication of the suggested differences between the Canadian and American experiences is that care needs to be exercised when any person, group or society seeks to propound principles and practices as universal. As stated in chapter one, it is necessary to be aware that, in a number of ways, Western culture has “colonized” our view of conflict, particularly in the presumption regarding conflict resolution that “Western problem-solving models of conflict resolution are not culturally universal as some authors claim. Rather they reflect unacknowledged cultural underpinnings of Western worldview.”²⁶⁹ An example of this may be Ken Sande’s statement that “These principles were developed by Peacemaker ministries.... These principles have also proven to be

²⁶⁹ Polly O. Walker, “Decolonizing Conflict Resolution: Addressing the Ontological Violence of Westernization,” *American Indian Quarterly* 28 (2004): 545.

universally countercultural.²⁷⁰ Indeed, those principles appear to be biblically grounded; nevertheless, such principles and their related practices may be freighted with a variety of unrecognized cultural values, assumptions and interpretations particular to the USA in the late 20th Century.

A second implication of the suggested differences between the Canadian and American experiences is that American resources may not be adequate to address Canadian issues. As proposed earlier, most (if not, substantially all) of the commonly available resources in the Canadian evangelical community related to conflict theory appear to be from American sources, directly or indirectly. The large number of reported incidents of conflict directed at Canadian and American congregational leaders, as well as the continuing high casualty rate among those leaders due to conflict,²⁷¹ continue unabated, despite the availability of these resources. Perhaps the apparent differences between Canadian and American experiences of conflict, and the evident continuation in conflict-related incidences in the lives of leaders and their congregations, should lead Canadian congregational leaders, as well as their educators and denominations, to consider other and better resources for dealing with the conflict they experience. At least it should encourage a more critical examination of any presumption that an American approach to conflict is sufficient for Canadian congregations and their leaders.

Third, the analysis of the data identified the presence of eight factors reported by congregational leaders. These eight factors were claimed by congregational leaders to have contributed not only to their endurance and survival of conflict directed at them personally,

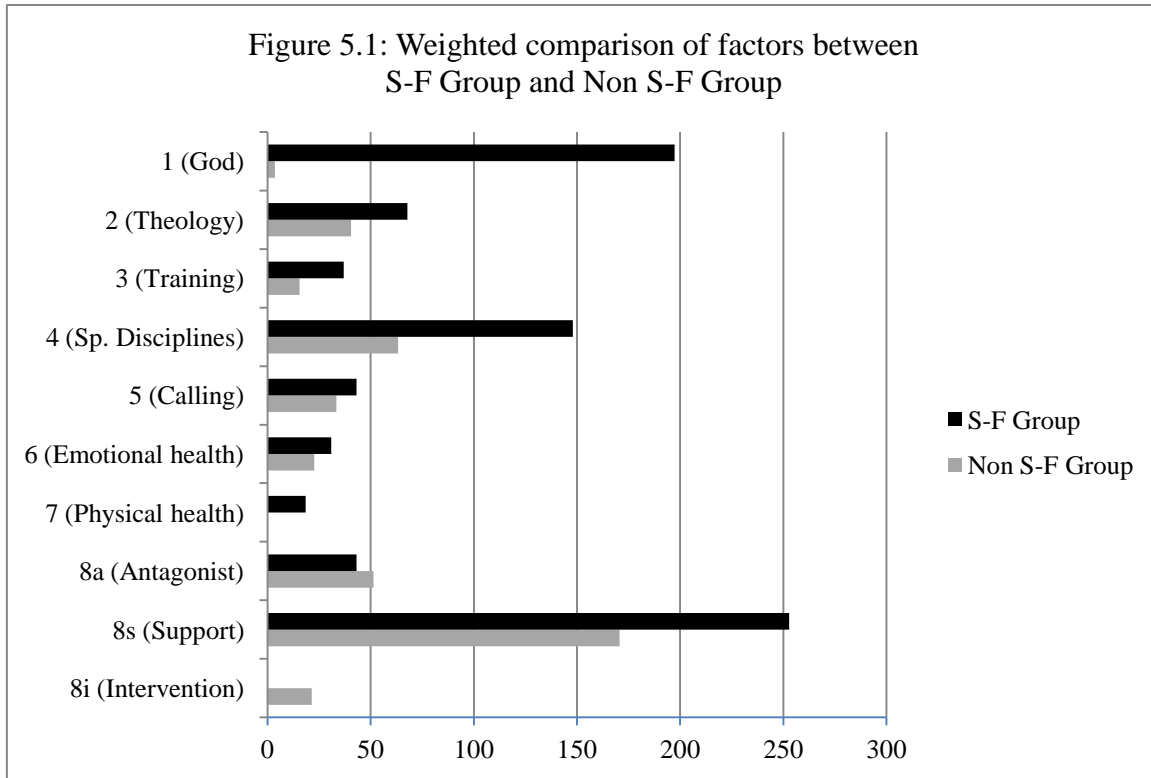
²⁷⁰ Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 13. Italics in Sande's text; underlining added.

²⁷¹ This was an important component of the statement of the problem examined in chapter one.

but also to their spiritual formation. As the research question for this Project relates specifically to spiritual formation reported in the lives of these congregational leaders, this summary and its related recommendations will focus upon the results gleaned from the fifty-five respondents that used language indicating an experience of spiritual formation in and through conflict directed at them.

A hypothesis of this Project is that conflict is, or can be, a place or occasion for spiritual formation in a congregational leader. In chapters two and three, an examination of current literature and biblical theology demonstrated that spiritual formation describes the process of change to a person's identity as he or she becomes more conformed to the likeness, or identity, of Jesus Christ. It is proposed that conflict is one of the crucible experiences in which this spiritual formation, or change toward Christ-like identity, can take place.

The data provided sufficient information for a comparison of the presence of the eight factors as reported in the lives of the fifty-five respondents identified as expressing spiritual formation in the context of their incident of conflict (i.e., the "S-F Group"), with the remaining 284 respondents who did not express spiritual formation in the context of their conflict (i.e., the "Non S-F Group"). Figure 4.6 set forth this comparison, and is reproduced here as figure 5.1.



As examined in previous chapters, these eight factors are summarized as: an existing intimacy with God; a functioning biblical theology; training for wholesome and competent behaviour; practising spiritual disciplines; being oriented to, or in, one’s call; attending to emotional and mental health; attending to physical health; and, relating to others (i.e., particularly to those who are supportive, but also to antagonists). It was proposed that these factors are interconnected and, to some extent, interdependent. Arguably, the first factor (i.e., an existing intimacy with God) incorporates, at least potentially, all of the other factors. In turn, an existing intimacy with God flows into, and is nurtured by, active engagement in the other seven factors. A limited focus upon any other factor or factors could, to some extent, avoid an existing intimacy with God. For example, it is conceivable that a person

could focus on attending to emotional health, or relating to supportive people, and minimize or avoid an existing intimacy with God.

It is this factor of an existing intimacy with God that stands out in the responses of the S-F Group in contrast to the Non S-F Group. This does not suggest that those in the Non S-F Group do not have a relationship with God, even an intimate relationship with God. However, their omission of language of, or otherwise not making reference to, an existing intimacy with God may be indicative of their understanding of such matters as conflict and spiritual formation. What is clear is that there is a correlation between respondents' expressions of an existing intimacy with God and their expressions of spiritual formation in a situation of conflict.

As evidenced in chapter four, all but two of the remaining (sub)factors were noticeably more present in the reports of the S-F Group (see figure 5.1). Those two (sub)factors were relating to others who were antagonists, and relating to others who were interveners. A slightly lower proportion of the S-F Group reported attempts to communicate or otherwise relate to the antagonist in the conflict. None of those in the S-F Group reported third party intervention. No further comment is made here regarding these two (sub)factors apart from the observation that they do not appear to have contributed, or contributed significantly, to spiritual formation in the S-F Group as distinct from the Non S-F Group. These two (sub)factors, of course, could be the focus of further research.

The eight identified factors were gleaned from the literature surveyed in chapter two. No one author or source considered provided all eight of these factors. Most of the literature viewed these factors as methods that could enable leaders to endure or survive situations of conflict directed at them. Some authors, such as Robert Clinton and Shelley Trebesch,

treated some of these factors as means to experiencing spiritual formation or growth in situations of conflict. This Project concludes these eight factors contribute to, or accompany, spiritual formation in the lives of congregational leaders experiencing conflict directed at them personally. This conclusion is consistent with the observations and conclusions discerned from the narratives and teachings of the biblical characters examined in chapter three.

B. Other ages, traditions and cultures

Before considering the application of the findings of this Project for further ministry and research, it may be helpful to consider the potential benefits of resources from other ages, traditions and cultures. Given the high frequency of conflict experienced by congregational leaders, and the apparently low incidence of spiritual formation reported by those leaders in conflict, it may be worthwhile to consider other perspectives, principles and practices relevant to this Project. This issue may be broached with the advice of C. S. Lewis who advocated the reading of old books – books from other ages. He wrote that:

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means old books. All contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook.... The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the same mistakes. They will not flatter us in the errors we are already committing; and their own error, being now open and palpable, will not endanger us. Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction.²⁷²

²⁷² C. S. Lewis, "Introduction," in *The Incarnation of the Word of God: Being the Treatise of St. Athanasius De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1947), 6-7.

What Lewis says about other ages may be extended to include other cultures, traditions and disciplines. For instance, as quoted in previous chapters, Ajith Fernando, a modern day Sri Lankan Christian, pointed out that “one of the most serious theological blind spots in the western church is a defective understanding of suffering.”²⁷³ It is therefore proposed that Canadian evangelical congregational leaders, if they are not doing so already, should be listening to, and learning from, the theology and practices of Christians who are experiencing conflict as followers of Jesus outside the sphere and culture of North American evangelicalism.

What other theological blind spots might Canadian evangelicals, and their congregational leaders, have? Perhaps a view that limits the experience of conflict to a “problem” that needs to be avoided or “fixed.” Perhaps an understanding of spiritual formation that does not practically embrace God’s *telos* of becoming more like Jesus Christ here and now. Perhaps a perspective that is not able to acknowledge that trials, such as conflict, are crucibles in which spiritual formation can be experienced.

What are some possible voices to which Canadian evangelical congregational leaders could listen regarding spiritual formation, conflict, suffering, leadership and related issues? Perhaps those who have not made the same “mistakes” as North American evangelicals include Henri J. M. Nouwen (1932-1996), a Roman Catholic priest and teacher who wrote *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* and *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, or Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) an Orthodox Christian priest and educator who in *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* speaks of personal growth and transformation. There are also *Life Together: The Classic*

²⁷³ Ajith Fernando, *The Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in Your Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 51.

Exploration of Christian Community by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), a German theologian and pastor, and *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter (1615-1691), an English Puritan theologian and church leader of the 17th Century.

The modern evangelical Singaporean theologian, Simon Chan, reinforces the need to listen to other voices. He writes: “Western scholars ... still constitute the vast majority of the global theological community. There is a tendency to assume that the predominant voice must be universally representative.”²⁷⁴ Chan challenges that assumption. Canadian evangelical congregational leaders, their educators and denominations, need to listen more attentively to other ages, traditions and cultures, if only to become aware of theological blind spots in their cultural and theological perspectives.

C. Application of Findings to Ministry

The findings of this Project identified eight factors that contributed to, or accompanied, expressions of spiritual formation in congregational leaders experiencing conflict directed at them personally from within their congregations. The obvious recommendation is that congregation leaders incorporate these factors into their lives.

This section will briefly consider the significance and application of the eight identified factors for ministry within congregations, particularly to congregational leaders experiencing conflict directed at them personally. This consideration of the identified factors will propose some applications and recommendations for intentional and practical engagement of these factors in the lives of congregational leaders. In the final analysis,

²⁷⁴ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 26.

leaders and their congregations will need to determine how these factors will be faithfully and effectively integrated into life.

As stated earlier, these factors are interconnected and, to some extent, interdependent. It has already been stated that the first factor (i.e., an existing intimacy with God) incorporates all of the other factors. As it appears possible to focus upon any of the other factors and avoid an existing intimacy with God, the following comments will presume the central necessity of an existing intimacy with God. As such, in the context of this Project, wholesome engagement with the other factors depends upon, and flows from, an existing intimacy with God, and in turn, those other factors contribute to nourishing that intimacy.

As noted, the first factor is described as an existing intimacy with God. As such, this intimacy is not a concept that lends itself to simply being a “circuit breaker” or fire-extinguisher in a time of crisis. Although a crisis may intensify or mature a person’s intimacy with God, the responses to the survey appear to attest that such intimacy already existed at the time of the crisis as a present and continuing relational engagement with the Triune God: Father, Son and Spirit. Therefore, if it is not already present, the priority must be established, or re-established, in the life of every congregational leader to have an existing and growing intimacy with God.

The second factor is described as a functioning biblical theology. This is theology or doctrine that is grounded in the text of the Bible and the best traditions of the Church. Darren Mark writes: “I see doctrine not as a boundary but as a compass. Its purpose is not to make Christians relevant or distinctive but rather to make them *faithful* in their contexts. Doctrine is a way of articulating what God’s presence in the church and the world looks

like.”²⁷⁵ He goes on to quote James K. A. Smith as saying “Theology is not some intellectual option that makes us ‘smart’ Christians; it is the graced understanding that makes us faithful disciples.”

If this analysis is correct, in the context of a congregational leader experiencing conflict directed at him or her from within a congregation, a functioning biblical theology acts as a compass that can bring an understanding of God’s presence and purpose into an otherwise disorienting situation. A functioning biblical theology acts as “the graced understanding that makes us faithful disciples.” Therefore, congregational leaders need to give continuing intentional attention to orthodox sources of biblical theology – listening to, engaging with, and living out orthodoxy for all of life.

The third factor is training for wholesome and competent behaviour. This training can be wide and varied. For instance, respondents have written about the benefits of training in biblical theology and spiritual disciplines, as well as family systems theory, resilience theory and conflict theory. Congregational leaders should be encouraged and enabled to continue to learn and train in areas that widen and deepen their competence in living godly lives and leading God’s people. As an example, several respondents referred to the benefits of training in conflict resolution or conflict management, while others commented that such training would have better equipped them for situations of conflict. This confirms the position of some of the authors surveyed in chapter two who observed that congregational leaders have not been adequately trained or prepared for conflict. At the congregational or interpersonal level, this training ought to include an understanding of what conflict is; the ways in which a leader can or should respond to conflict; and, approaches to conflict

²⁷⁵ Darren C. Marks, “The Mind Under Grace: Why a Heady Dose of Doctrine is Crucial to Spiritual Formation,” http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=87055 (accessed December 3, 2010).

resolution, conflict management and conflict transformation. This does not necessarily make congregational leaders experts in conflict theory, but it should equip them to be wholesome and competent in how they understand and respond to conflict, especially when it is directed at them.

One current example of a denomination's steps to equip congregations and their leaders in conflict resolution techniques is the Peacemaking Project being developed by the Canadian Pacific Region of CMAC in partnership with Outreach Canada. The stated goal of that venture is:

to empower leaders/elders, regional mediators and local peacemakers to serve the congregations in the [Canadian] Pacific District and to provide guidance in creating workable and transferable policies for healthy and godly non-disciplinary resolution of disputes. This goal has the potential of radically altering the way conflict is managed in the family system called C&MA [Canadian] Pacific District. The spin off benefits will be the positive influence on marriages, families and other relationships within and outside congregational life.²⁷⁶

The fourth identified factor is practising spiritual disciplines. This was the third most frequent reported factor among all respondents who had experienced conflict directed at them personally. On a proportionate basis, practising spiritual disciplines was reported well over twice as often by those expressing language of spiritual formation (i.e., S-F Group) than those in the Non S-F Group. These spiritual disciplines most often were careful reading of Scripture (i.e., *lectio divina*) and praying, but also included self-examination and confession, fasting and solitude.

For those who are not familiar with spiritual disciplines or who are not currently practising spiritual disciplines it would be helpful to learn and train in practising spiritual

²⁷⁶ Taken from a draft proposal to the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Pacific District, entitled "Building Capacity for a Healthy and Godly Non-Disciplinary Dispute Resolution System," prepared by Alan Simpson of Outreach Canada, September 2010. The addition of "Canadian" in brackets was requested by the CMAC representative granting permission to use this quote.

disciplines through reading available literature and engaging with those who are competently practising spiritual disciplines. These resources, and the practices they espouse, should be carefully considered through the lens of Scripture, while allowing for learning and growth in the disciplines consistent with Scripture beyond current experience.

Some of the available literature on the subject of spiritual disciplines is included in the bibliography such as *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster, *Invitation to a Journey* by Robert Mulholland, *Eat This Book* by Eugene Peterson, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney, and *The Great Omission* by Dallas Willard. As suggested earlier, Christian writers from other ages, traditions and cultures should also be considered such as Henri Nouwen (e.g., *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* and *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*), Alexander Schmemmann (e.g., *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (e.g., *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*), Richard Baxter (e.g., *The Reformed Pastor*), as well as Thomas à Kempis (e.g., *The Imitation of Christ* and *Counsels on the Spiritual Life*), Andrew Murray (*The School of Obedience* and *Abide in Christ*), and John of the Cross (e.g., *Dark Night of the Soul*).

The fifth identified factor is being oriented to, and in, one's call or purpose.²⁷⁷ For the most part, respondents appear to have used the concept of calling in a vocational sense related to their congregational leadership and Christian ministry. This understanding is consistent with the experience of biblical characters commissioned by the Lord into their ministries. As such, this deep sense of vocational calling or purpose needs to be

²⁷⁷ The reader is referred to the cautionary comments regarding a common use of the terms "calling" and "vocation" at page 51 above.

remembered, and perhaps occasionally revisited, so that it contributes to orientation and direction for leaders experiencing conflict directed at them personally.

The sixth and seventh identified factors are attending to emotional or mental health, and attending to physical health. The presence of both these factors is consistent with a holistic and biblical view of humanity. R. Paul Stevens has made the point that, as humans, we do not just *have* a spirit, we *are* spirit; and we do not just *have* a body, we *are* body.²⁷⁸ To some extent, this concept moves us toward the significant truth that our bodies and our minds matter to the resilience, competence and effectiveness of, amongst others, congregational leaders. Experiences of conflict directed against congregational leaders are times of crisis or stress spiritually, mentally and physically. It is of interest that few respondents mentioned physical exercise as a factor utilized in responding to conflict. In fact, all those who did specifically refer to physical exercise were in the S-F Group. Congregational leaders should be cultivating life-giving rhythms of rest and action in all of life – spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23).²⁷⁹ For instance, congregational leaders who have an existing intimacy with God and who build into their lives such wholesome regimes as physical exercise and the concept of sabbath²⁸⁰ appear not only to be more resilient, but also to experience spiritual formation.

The eighth identified factor is relating to others, specifically the sub-factor of others who are supportive of the congregational leader experiencing conflict. The support of “others” was the single greatest reported factor among the respondents as contributing to

²⁷⁸ R. Paul Stevens in a lecture in or about 2001 at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada.

²⁷⁹ For example, see generally R. Paul Stevens and Alvin Ung, *Taking Your Soul to Work: Overcoming the Nine Deadly Sins of the Workplace* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010), 150-155.

²⁸⁰ In this sense, “sabbath” is not so much a fixed time of rest (as important as that may be), but as Walter Brueggemann writes, a “desisting from the frantic pursuit of securing the world on our own terms” [Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 95].

enduring or surviving conflict, as well as to experiencing spiritual formation in situations of conflict. The prevalence of this factor indicates its perceived value to the respondents, and highlights the necessity of continuing engagement in, rather than withdrawal from, wholesome community in times of conflict and other crises. However, an element of caution may be necessary.

Authors such as Kenneth Haugk and Shelley Trebesch write of a supportive “other” in terms of a confessor-confidant or a mentor. The caution is that this sub-factor of a supportive “other” includes spouses and family, friends, colleagues and others. Some of these people may listen, challenge, advise and encourage, while others may simply enable a dysfunctional leader or situation. Thus discernment is needed to best ensure the presence and contribution of those “others” who act as wholesome counsellors, spiritual directors, and confessor-confidants for spiritual formation, not as enablers of dysfunction. This discernment can be informed by careful biblical inquiry (e.g., consider Nathan’s confrontation of David in 2 Samuel 12), and consideration of current literature (e.g., note the characteristics of a confessor-confidant or mentor provided by Haugk and Trebesch²⁸¹).

Further general applications of these findings to ministry include the perceived need to make congregational leaders aware of this research, and to provide the means and encouragement for implementation of the identified factors in their lives and ministries. As part of the agreement with the six denominations participating in this study, a copy of this Project’s dissertation will be provided to each denomination’s national representative as well as to Outreach Canada. The author will also be reasonably available to these organizations to

²⁸¹ Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 114-120; Shelley Trebesch, *Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas, 1997), 61f.

assist in interpretation. In addition, an executive summary of this Project will be provided to each respondent who requested it.²⁸²

It is proposed that a wider awareness of the identified factors and their significance may be accomplished through teaching, website availability and publications. This may also include development of materials that will assist in the recognition and practical employment of these factors in the lives of congregational leaders. In turn, it could be anticipated that the congregations in which those leaders serve will receive instruction, and observe models, of the findings of this research thereby being equipped to engage conflict in more wholesome and competent ways.

In summary, this Project proposes that all eight of the identified factors need to be consistently recognized and employed in the lives and ministries of congregational leaders. Primacy is given to the first factor, an existing and growing intimacy with God. The other factors flow from and nurture intimacy with God.

D. Application of the Findings to Future Research

It is further proposed that the findings of this Project contribute to, and encourage, further research in numerous related matters. Four suggestions are set forth here.

First, this research was delimited to leaders serving in English-speaking evangelical congregations in Canada. As such, leaders within non-English-speaking congregations, non-evangelical congregations, and congregations outside of Canada, were not surveyed. If the findings of this study are important and useful, this suggests that further research of these other congregational leaders may also be important and useful. Thus, inquiring into the

²⁸² Of the 496 respondents, 323 requested that an executive summary be forwarded to the e-mail addresses they provided. These e-mail addresses, and names, were collected by an on-line link separate from the survey to maintain the anonymity of the survey responses.

experience of congregational leaders of congregations that are culturally distinct from English-speaking evangelical congregations could be beneficial. These other congregational leaders could be from ethnic Christian congregations (e.g., African, Chinese, Hispanic, South Asian), or from non-evangelical Christian traditions. Such research could equip leaders within these other communities to deal more competently and wholesomely with conflict in the context of their cultures and traditions.

Second, this Project commented briefly on findings related to two identifiable groups within its sample of respondents. One of these groups is female congregational leaders and matters particular to them in the context of conflict. The other group is composed of those congregational leaders who were over 65 years of age and had served for at least 21 years. What is it about those congregational leaders that produced the anomalous results of significantly lower incidents of conflict experienced by them as congregational leaders? And, what can younger and emerging leaders learn from their experiences?

Third, this research advocates that Christian denominations and educators intentionally train congregational leaders, and others, conflict theory skills. Presuming this has not been recently investigated, additional research could survey the presence and nature of such training within denominations, seminaries and colleges, and other supporting and equipping institutions within the evangelical community in Canada.

Fourth, this study suggests a critical review of any presumption that the experiences of congregational leaders in Canada and American are the same, or similar. Further research could determine the extent to which that presumption exists, and the degree to which it may help or hinder congregational leaders in Canada to deal with conflict.

These are a few proposals for additional inquiry suggested by the findings of this Project.

E. Conclusion

Chapter one began with the story of Paul. That story was a composite of real-life experiences of congregational leaders. This research confirms that such leaders should expect conflict directed at them personally, and that they should be equipped for it.

Within the limited scope of this study, it is submitted that the presence and practice of the eight identified factors in the lives of congregational leaders not only will enable them to endure and survive conflict more wholesomely and competently, but also will contribute to their identity becoming more Christ-like. It is not that these leaders should look for conflict, but they should not fear it or avoid it either. The hope, if not the promise, is that conflict is a crucible for spiritual formation in congregational leaders.

Appendix A - Form of Introductory E-mail Letter to National Denominational Representatives

November 1, 2010

To: [names and titles]

Dear _____,

[Regional, district or other denominational representative (regional representative)] has referred me to you regarding the participation of the [denominational name and abbreviation] in research for my D.Min. project/thesis. This letter is being forwarded to you through [name of regional representative] to confirm that referral, and ensure that it reaches the correct addresses.

My project proposes that [denominational abbreviation], together with the other denominations formally associated as ACTS, be the basis for the investigation of my research question. Dr. Ray Bystrom is the supervisor for this project, and Dr. Ron Toews is the second reader.

A fair amount of research has been done regarding conflict as a major (if not the leading) cause for pastors and other ministry leaders leaving their churches and/or ministry. Not much research appears to have been done regarding how pastors and other leaders who have gone through congregational conflict have been enabled to "stay in the saddle" – this is the focus of my project. It is believed that the findings of this project could have significant value to congregational leaders, congregations, and the Church at large.

Outreach Canada (OC) is my research partner in this project. A national survey is proposed for January 2011. It is hoped that all six (6) of the denominations formally associated as ACTS (including, until recently, C&MA) will participate in this survey. Participation would be in the form of an invitation to the pastors/leaders of English-speaking congregations in Canada sent from the national offices of each of these denominations. This invitation would provide a link to the on-line survey on the OC server. The responses are to be anonymous. It is anticipated that the responses will provide a meaningful insight into important aspects of conflict and transformation experienced by evangelical congregational leaders in Canada.

A summary of the data and findings of this research will be made available to participants.

I attach pdf copies of my proposal, the proposed survey, and the text of a letter from Dr. Bystrom (addressed to the district superintendent of the denomination with which he is affiliated). The survey is currently being reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of ACTS/TWU.

I propose telephoning you next week to briefly discuss the possibility of [denominational abbreviation] participation in this national survey. If there is a person, other than yourself, who you prefer that I speak with, please let me know the name and contact information for that person.

I thank you in advance for the courtesy of your response.

Every blessing,

John B. MacDonald [insert home and cell telephone numbers]

**Appendix B - Form of E-mail to National Denominational Representatives
December 19, 2010**

Dear [name of national denominational representative]

Further to your agreement to participate in this research, I am pleased to inform you that the on-line survey is ready to go. All six (6) denominations represented by ACTS at Trinity Western University have agreed to participate in this research. This letter aims to shape the form and content of the letter of invitation to your pastors. As such:

1. I have attached the proposed text of the letter. I have endeavoured to keep your time and energy to a minimum in this regard.
2. I anticipate that you will add your denominational logo, use your normal format of communication, and have it signed/endorsed by the appropriate denominational representative. You may also want to amend the wording so it sounds more like you. The goal is to have each pastor of your English-speaking congregations see the value of this research, and encourage them to participate in the survey.
3. It is anticipated that in or about the second week of January, 2011 your invitation letter will be sent from your national office by e-mail to each of the pastors of English-speaking congregations of your denomination within Canada. The actual date of e-mailing the letter of invitation to your pastors is left to you.
4. The Research Ethics Board (REB) of ACTS at Trinity Western University has approved the research procedure of this project, including the on-line survey. The survey has been put on-line and has been the subject of testing for the last two weeks. The survey may be viewed at <http://crucible.outreach.ca> . The entrance/introduction to the survey sets out matters required by REB including a brief explanation of the project, the procedure, the potential risks and benefits of participation, and the like.
5. As indicated earlier, this survey is on a secure server of Outreach Canada and the responses are anonymous. At the conclusion of the survey there is an opportunity for a participant to request a summary of the research when it has been compiled and analyzed. Although an e-mail address is requested to provide this summary, those addresses are collected on a separate server and data base to ensure anonymity of the survey respondents.
6. I am asking that you provide me with your proposed form of invitational letter to your pastors at your early opportunity so that, together, we can ensure that the needs of your denomination, REB and the research are met. I look forward to receiving that letter, and am available to discuss the form and content by e-mail or telephone [home telephone number inserted here].

7. When the invitational e-mail goes to your pastors, I will have a few questions for you such as the number of pastors to whom the letter was sent and the number of congregations represented, and the like. This information is required to establish a statistical base line.

I thank you for your participation, interest and investment in this project. It is hoped that it will have benefit to the Church at large, and your denomination in particular.

Every blessing,

John B. MacDonald

Appendix C - Form of E-mail of January 5, 2011

Dear [national representative]

Everything is now ready for participation in the on-line survey.

You will have received my letter of December 19th (below) reporting to you and asking you to prepare the form of e-mail to your pastors of English-speaking congregations. A suggested form for this letter is provided (attached) to minimize your time in this matter. You may choose to shape this letter in your own way provided the basic information required by the Research Ethics Board (REB) is included.

Please send me a copy of your form of letter for review prior to it being sent to your pastors to ensure that it fulfills the requirements of the REB.

Subject to review of your proposed letter, I ask that you **send your e-mailed letter** to each of the pastors of your English-speaking congregations during the second or third week of January 2011 (i.e., Jan. 9-22 or thereabouts). We will be leaving the link open for participation from January 9th to the end of February.

Upon sending your e-mailed invitations, I ask that you provide me with your **brief responses to the following questions** as of January 1, 2011. This information is necessary to establish a statistical base for the research.

1. a. Total number of congregations of your denomination within Canada:
 - b. Total number of current pastors (senior, associate, etc.) for these congregations:

2. a. Total number of English-speaking congregations of your denomination within Canada:
 - b. Total number of current pastors (senior, associate, etc.) for these English-speaking congregations:

 - c. Total number of current pastors of your denomination who received the e-mail invitation to participate in this on-line survey:

 - d. If your response in (c) differs from the response in (b), please provide a brief explanation for this difference (e.g., a congregation may represent a distinct culture as a homogeneous ethnic community, such as Filipino or Chinese, even though English is the main or only language used).

3. Please provide me (by return attachment or other electronic means) with a true copy of your letter of invitation to your pastors together with the date the e-mail was sent.

If you have **any questions or concerns** related to this research, please do not hesitate to contact me (e-mail or [home telephone number inserted here]).

I look forward to your early reply and thank you for your interest in this study.

Every blessing,

John B. MacDonald

Appendix D - Form of Invitation from Denominational Representative

[letterhead of denomination]

Dear _____

Re: Conflict as a Crucible for Spiritual Transformation in Congregational Leaders

Our denomination has agreed to participate with five other evangelical denominations in research regarding conflict directed at pastors and other congregational leaders.

Conflict is a leading cause of pastors and other Christian leaders leaving their congregations, and perhaps leaving Christian service entirely. What does not appear to be as well known are those critical factors that enable pastors and other leaders to remain in productive Christian service and to grow through the experience of conflict. Identifying these critical factors is the focus of this research.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a national on-line survey. At this time, the research is limited to English-speaking congregations. The results of this survey will give us insights into how we as pastors and leaders can be better equipped to respond to conflict competently and wholesomely.

The survey will take about 10-30 minutes to complete, depending on the fullness of some of your responses. You are free to withdraw from the survey at any point. All survey responses submitted will be anonymous and your privacy will be protected.

The link to the online-survey is <http://crucible.outreach.ca/> . Simply 'click' on this link to enter the survey.

This survey is part of a research project in partnership with Outreach Canada. John B. MacDonald (john.macdonald@mytwu.ca) is the researcher of this survey as part of his D.Min. requirements at ACTS Seminaries at Trinity Western University. Dr. Ray Bystrom is his advisor (ray.bystrom@twu.ca). The research findings and thesis will be made available as a resource to our denomination.

Thank you for your consideration in responding to this survey.

[Denomination representative]

Appendix E - Project Information Letter and Consent, Survey, and Survey Conclusion as Posted On-line



ACTS Seminaries of Trinity Western University Langley, British Columbia Project Information Letter and Consent

Conflict as a Crucible for Spiritual Transformation in Congregational Leaders

Principal Investigator: John B. MacDonald, ACTS Seminaries john.macdonald@mytwu.ca 604-777-0790

Advisor: Dr. Ray Bystrom, ACTS Seminaries ray.bystrom@twu.ca 604-513-2044

Introduction

As leaders of Christian congregations in Canada we are probably aware that our congregational communities experience conflict. This includes conflict directed at congregational leaders personally.

Conflict is a leading cause of pastors and other Christian leaders leaving their congregations, and perhaps leaving Christian service entirely. What does not appear to be as well known are those critical factors that enable pastors and other leaders to remain in productive Christian service and to grow through the experience of conflict.

We are interested in your assessment of congregational conflict that you have experienced, particularly conflict that may have been directed at you personally as a leader within a congregation. We would like to know about the success and challenges you have had, and your insights into what factors you found helpful or beneficial to you personally in responding to, and processing, a situation of conflict that may have been directed against you.

This is not an evaluation of you or any congregation. Rather it is an opportunity to give information that will help all of us understand something of the causes and dynamics of conflict, particularly if you have come through an incident of conflict directed against you personally. The responses to this survey will be valuable for identifying critical factors for equipping Christian leaders to respond to conflict more competently and wholesomely.

This project is a partnership of Outreach Canada with John B. MacDonald as principal investigator or researcher. John is a Doctor of Ministry student completing this study under the supervision of Dr. Ray Bystrom, of ACTS

Seminaries, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of his degree. Others assisting in the research are Lorne Hunter and Phil Cox of Outreach Canada.

Procedure

Participation in this study involves completion of an on-line survey. It is estimated that completion of the survey may take between 15 to 30 minutes. This estimate is subject to differing levels of thoroughness and personal engagement by participants.

The survey includes questions about the context of conflict you have experienced. That context includes your position, age, experience and denominational affiliation. If you have experienced conflict directed at you personally as a congregational leader there is an exploration of your understanding of the cause of that conflict, its affect upon you and how you responded. There are opportunities to explain your experience and insights.

When the research is completed a summary of the findings will be available. There is a section in the survey where you can request that summary by providing your e-mail address. To give this e-mail address the survey link is closed and a separate link and data base receives your request. Your e-mail address will only be used to provide the requested summary to you.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

In participating in this survey you may experience some emotional discomfort if you are recalling an incident or incidents of conflict. If you are currently being counselled regarding conflict you are invited to withdraw from participating in this survey. If at any time you want to withdraw from the survey you are also invited to withdraw. We wish to remind you that this is not an evaluation of you or your congregation. Rather it is an opportunity to give information that will help all of us better understand how Christian leaders respond to conflict, and to give ideas about how leaders may respond to conflict more competently and wholesomely.

If you experience discomfort as a result of recalling conflict, you may want to contact the appropriate person or resource for counselling recommended by your denomination. Other resources available to you include:

- Clergy Care Network toll-free at 1-888-525-3749 or e-mail at info@clergycare.ca. This resource offers complimentary phone counselling, consultation, resource or retreat suggestions, or counselling referrals.
- Oasis Retreats at 604-832-6792 or e-mail bob.armstrong@powertochange.org .
- Alan Simpson (conflict coach) with Outreach Canada at 604-837-0613 or e-mail asimpson@outreach.ca .

Potential Benefits

The benefits of participation could include the opportunity to contribute your experiences and insights for the benefit of other pastors and Christian leaders. These may include what you believe to be your successes as well as what (if anything) you would have done differently. These contributions could provide hope to those who are dealing with situations arising from conflict, and skills to existing and aspiring Christian leaders. Potential benefits of this research could spread to those in our congregations and the society in general thereby enhancing the mission of the Church

Confidentiality

Responses to the survey are anonymous other than identifying elements that may be contained in your responses. The responses to the questions will be stored and password protected. Only Outreach Canada as well as John B. MacDonald and Dr. Ray Bystrom will have access to the survey raw data file. The survey raw data will be stored and password protected on the Outreach Canada server. No identifying information will be collected or stored in this file. The survey raw data may be stored anonymously for future research purposes.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this survey.

Contact for Information

If you have questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact John B. MacDonald (john.macdonald@mytwu.ca).

Contact for Concerns about the Rights of Research Participants

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact Ms. Sue Funk in the Office of Research, Trinity Western University at 604-513-2142 or sue.funk@twu.ca.

Consent

Once you have submitted your responses to the survey those responses cannot be withdrawn. At that point it is not reasonably possible for the researcher to identify your responses in order to remove them because the researcher cannot determine which responses were provided by you.

By clicking "Continue to Survey" you are indicating that you consent to participate in this study and that your responses may be put in anonymous form and kept for further use after completion of this study. This will include quotes from any open-ended response that you provide. If you need to step away from the survey temporarily, clicking on the link again will take you back to the same spot you left off if you use the same computer. We recommend that you print a copy of this letter and consent for your records.

We would appreciate you completing the survey and providing information and insights about how Christian leaders may deal with conflict more competently and wholesomely.

CONTINUE to SURVEY or **NO THANK YOU**

General Information

1. What best describes your current position as a congregational leader? (Choose only one)*

- Senior pastor of a multi-staff church
- Associate or assistant pastor of a multi-staff church
- Solo pastor
- Lay leader (please specify)

- Other (please specify)

2. Are you:*

- Male Female

3. What is the total length of time you have served in congregations in some leadership position (whether as clergy or laity)? *

- Less than 2 years
- 2 to less than 6 years
- 6 to less than 11 years
- 11 to less than 21 years

21 years or more

4. How long have you been in some leadership position at your current church?*

Less than 2 years

2 to less than 6 years

6 to less than 11 years

11 to less than 21 years

21 years or more

5. What is your current age?*

Under 30 years 30-45 46-55 56-65 over 65

6. With which denomination are you presently affiliated? (Choose only one)*

Baptist General Conference of Canada

Mennonite Brethren Conference

Christian and Missionary Alliance

Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Evangelical Free Church of Canada

None

Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada Other (please specify)

7. At any time while you have served in a congregation in some leadership position, have you experienced congregational conflict of any kind?*

Yes No

8. Have you ever left a congregation in which you held a position of leadership due to conflict?*

Yes No

9. If 'yes' to the previous question, how long had you been in that congregation when you left? *

Less than 2 years

2 to less than 6 years

6 to less than 11 years

11 to less than 21 years

21 years or more

10. At any time while you have served in a congregation in some leadership position, have you experienced conflict directed at you personally from within a congregation?*

Yes, in the past Yes, currently Yes, both in the past and currently No

If you answered “yes” to this question please proceed to the next section.

If you answered “no” to this question this is the conclusion of your involvement in this survey. We thank you for the information you have provided – it will be a valued contribution to this study.

B. Experience with Conflict Directed at You as a Leader

In answering “yes” to the preceding question you are experiencing, or have experienced, conflict directed at you personally from within a congregation in which you are, or were, a leader. For this section of the survey, you are asked to recall a significant conflict directed at you as a leader from a congregation in which you are or were a leader.

11. Have you identified one significant conflict directed at you as a leader from within a congregation in which you are or were a leader ("the conflict")?*

Yes

12. Option: Briefly describe one significant conflict directed against you personally as a leader in a congregation.



(Please respond to the remainder of this survey with reference to this significant conflict you have just described. This will be referred to as "the conflict.")

13. How long ago did you first become aware of the conflict?*

Less than 1 years 5 to less than 10 years

1 to less than 2 years 10 years or more

2 to less than 5 years

14. At the time of the conflict, what best describes the position you then held as a congregational leader? (Choose only one)*

Senior pastor of a multi-staff church

Associate or assistant pastor of a multi-staff church

Solo pastor

Lay leader (please specify)

Other (please specify)

15. At the time of the conflict, what was the approximate average worship attendance of that congregation? *

100 or fewer 101-200 201-300 301-500 501-1,000 over 1,000

16. At the time of the conflict, with which denomination was the congregation affiliated? (Choose only one)*

Baptist General Conference of Canada

Mennonite Brethren Conference

Christian and Missionary Alliance

Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Evangelical Free Church of Canada

None

Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada Other (please specify)

17. What governance model would best describe the congregation in which the conflict took place? (Choose the best description) *

"episcopalian" - bishop led (hierarchical)

"presbyterian" - elder led (ruling elders and teaching elders)

- "congregational" - single elder/pastor
- "congregational" - plural elder/pastor (team approach)
- Other (please specify)

18. In your opinion, which of the following were sources of the conflict? (Select all that apply)*

- Control issues
- Leadership style
- Cultural or social issue(s)
- Moral issue(s)
- Family or spouse issue(s)
- Theological or doctrinal issue(s)
- Financial issue(s)
- Vision or direction of the congregation
- Leadership change(s)
- Other (please specify)

19. How did you first find out about the conflict? (Choose only one)*

- Congregant(s)
- Church board member or another leader within the church
- Church staff
- Denominational official

- Someone outside the congregation (not a denominational official)
- Spouse or family member
- Other (please specify)

20. Was the person identified in the preceding question the individual or group who directed the conflict at you?*

- Yes No

21. When you first found out about the conflict, who already knew about the conflict? (Check all that apply)*

- The individual or group who had directed the conflict at me
- My spouse or a member of my family
- A small group within the congregation
- A large group within the congregation, but not a majority
- A majority or nearly the entire congregation
- A person or group outside of the congregation

22. What was your initial response to the conflict? The following are in alphabetical order. (Select all that apply)*

- Angry Confident Peaceful Other (please specify)

- Apathetic Defensive Shocked

- Compassionate Overwhelmed Sympathetic

23. How did you deal with, or attempt to deal with, the conflict? (Select all that apply)*

- Directly with the other person or group in the conflict
- Informal or behind the scene process
- Sought assistance from the congregation's internal resources
- Sought assistance from the congregation's denominational resources
- Sought counsel from outside resources (only select if different from denominational resources)
- Formal public process
- Have done nothing yet
- Other (please specify)

24. Please provide any additional information that may give a better insight into how you were affected by the conflict. This may include any impact upon you, your spouse and other family members, your friends (both within and outside the congregation), your health, ministry focus, and the like.

25. What negative effects of the conflict have you experienced? (Select all that apply)*

- Anger
- Bitterness
- Damaged relationships
- Loss of trust
- Loss of communication with the other person or group engaged in the conflict
- Recurrent memories of the conflict that trigger bouts of anger, sadness or the like.
- Sadness
- No negative effects
- Other (please specify)

26. What positive effects of the conflict have you experienced? (Select all that apply)*

- Better communication with the other person or group engaged in the conflict
- Better defined vision
- Better equipped to assist others in conflict situations
- More hopeful
- More thankful
- Purifying effect
- Reconciliation with some or all of others engaged in the conflict
- Stronger (personally)

- Stronger relationships
 - Wiser
 - No positive effects
 - Other (please specify in a few words)
-

27. Comment on those factors that you found helpful or beneficial to you personally in responding to the conflict, in processing the conflict and resolving the conflict in respect to yourself, your family and your ministry. Enter "No Comment" if you prefer to not provide any answer.*

28. In retrospect, what (if anything), would you have done differently?

To finalize your answers and submit this survey simply click on the SUBMIT FORM button below.

Otherwise you may navigate back and update any of your answers.

If you do not click on the SUBMIT FORM button then your answers will not be saved nor included in the survey results.

Survey Conclusion

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Your responses are a valuable contribution to exploring and better understanding conflict directed at Christian leaders, and how those leaders respond to, and process conflict. This data will help others who are currently affected by conflict, and equip others to deal with conflict wholesomely.

If you want a summary of the findings of this survey and related information, kindly provide the e-mail address to which the summary should be delivered upon its completion. Please note that your e-mail address is sent to a separate data base from your survey responses to protect anonymity.

If you desire to add any comments or observations related to this survey or research, please feel free to do so in the space provided.

Contact Information

Email:

Enter your Email address:

Email Is Required. Email Must be Valid.

Name:

Enter your Name:

Message:

Enter your message:



Send

Appendix F - Text of E-mail sent to Potential Testers of the Draft On-line Survey

December 10, 2010

We all know the pain and devastation conflict can have on churches and ministry leaders. Many pastors have left a church, or stepped out of ministry altogether, in part, due to conflict. Conflict doesn't have to have devastating negative consequences.

John B. MacDonald, D.Min. student at ACTS Seminaries, contacted Alan inquiring as to whether or not OC could help him with research for his thesis. A partnership agreement was signed by John and Craig. This collaborative research project concerning the effects of conflict on church leaders is mutually beneficial for both parties, and presents us with an opportunity to increase our understanding of the Canadian church through a particular lens. John has entitled his project, "Conflict as a Crucible for Spiritual Transformation in Congregational Leaders".

Over the past couple months Phil Cox and I have been working with John in developing and designing the questionnaire and subsequent on-line survey instrument. We are currently in the testing phase of the process. Pre-testing is a critical part in any survey design process – it allows for feedback to improve the research tool.

Thus the reason you are receiving this email. Can you please take some time to complete the survey and provide us with feedback? I know this is a busy time of year for all of us so I understand if you not able to participate in this testing phase. We will keep the testing phase open until December 31. Your responses to each of the questions will be kept confidential.

For additional information about the questionnaire and/or to participate in pre-testing please click on the link below:

<http://crucible.outreach.ca>

Below are a list of questions to consider as you work through the questionnaire:

- Approximately how long did you spend in completing the survey?
- Did the questions proceed in a logical manner from topic to topic?
- Are there any questions that were unclear, awkward, ambiguous or misleading? If so, could you please identify the question(s) and the perceived shortfall(s)? Perhaps you could also suggest how the question could be improved or corrected.

- Did you perceive that there were any areas/questions that were missed, or not dealt with sufficiently? If so, could you suggest what those areas/questions may be?
- Did you perceive that there were any irrelevant or redundant questions? If so, could you suggest what those questions were?
- Did you experience any errors (glitches) in the survey tool?
- What was your overall perception of the survey?

Even if conflict has not been directed at you personally as a leader within a congregation you can still participate in the first part of this survey. On behalf of John MacDonald and Phil Cox I want to thank you in advance for your participation in the pre-testing of this tool.

Lorne Hunter, Director of Research

Appendix G - Comparison of Findings of this Project with the CTI Report²⁸³

This appendix sets forth a limited comparison of findings from the CTI Report and this Project²⁸⁴ for the purpose of identifying some similarities and dissimilarities between these two bodies of research, and thus potential similarities and dissimilarities between the experiences of conflict for congregational leaders in the United States of America (USA) and Canada.

The CTI Report was published in 2004 and is based upon a survey of completed questionnaires from 506 pastors who subscribed to *Leadership Magazine*,²⁸⁵ almost all of whom served as senior or solo pastors in churches in the USA, except for one who was located in Canada. The survey for this Project was conducted in 2011 and relies upon completed surveys from 496 respondents, all of whom served as congregational leaders within English-speaking evangelical churches in Canada.

It is not clear from the CTI Report what cultural variables were present in the sample. For instance, if Hispanic-American or Black-American congregations were included in the sample that could have influenced the data obtained. In this Project, invitations to participate were extended to leaders of evangelical English-speaking congregations – a delimitation intended to avoid, or to minimize, cultural variables in the data. Further research is encouraged regarding these cultural variables. The theological stances of the respondents to both studies may also contribute to differences in findings. Whereas the participants to this Project are presumed to be predominantly evangelical because of their denominational affiliations, those participating in the CTI Report included not only evangelicals but also

²⁸³ Eric Reed, "Leadership Surveys Church Conflict," *Leadership* 25/4 (2004): 25-26. The report upon which this article is based was prepared by *Christianity Today International Church Research Report* and is entitled "Managing Church Conflict: The Source, Pastors Reactions and Its Effects,"

<http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/downloads/churchresearch/cr12.html> (accessed June 22, 2010).

Hereinafter this report will be referred to as the "CTI Report."

²⁸⁴ For purposes of clarity, and to distinguish this research project from the CTI Report, the survey results of "Conflict as a Crucible for Spiritual Formation in Congregational Leaders" will be referred to as "this Project."

²⁸⁵ *Leadership Magazine* is published by Christianity Today International, Carol Stream, Illinois. See also leadershipjournal.net. Of the respondents to the CTI Report 97% designated themselves as senior or solo pastors.

those who described their affiliations by such terms as conservative, traditional confessional, fundamental and liberal.²⁸⁶

In a number of cases, direct comparisons between the results of the two studies could not be made. However, there often was sufficient data to draw out some comparatives.

For these and other reasons, the observations and conclusions set forth in this appendix are tentative and cautious. Further research would be needed to provide more substantive and conclusive results.

In the following comparatives, the results of this study have been grouped to match the categories of the CTI Report. When percentages are used, this study has usually been rounded to the nearest percentage for comparison with the CTI study, which may result in slight rounding errors.

A. Some General Comparatives

	<u>CTI Report</u>	<u>This Project</u>
1. Number of Respondents	506	496
2. Margin of Error (+/-; 19 times out of 20)	4.36%	4.08%
3. Positions of Respondents:		
Senior pastor	64%	39%
Solo pastor	33	20
Other	3	41
4. Female respondents	3%	7%
5. Ages:		
Under 45 years	17%	41%
45-54 years	47	35
55-64 years	28	20
Over 65	7	5
6. Reported general congregational conflict	94%	96%

²⁸⁶ CTI Report, 20, indicates that 81% of its respondents described themselves as evangelical. However, multiple responses to this inquiry were allowed. As a result there were those that designated themselves as conservative (47%); as traditional confessional (16%); as liberal (4%); and, as other (12%). The point is that the respondents to the CTI Report may have had discernable theological and practice preferences that were distinct from the six evangelical denominations that participated in this Project.

7.	Reported conflict directed at them personally from within congregation (Senior and solo pastors only) ²⁸⁷	79% (79)	82% (87)
8.	Left a pastoral or leadership position due to conflict (senior/solo pastors only)	38%	32%

B. Some Observations

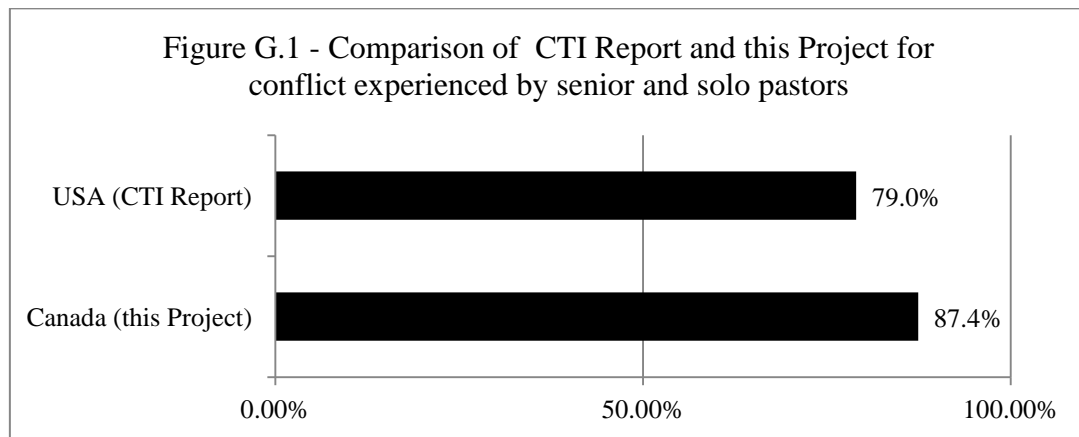
This section will make some general observations between the two studies. When findings are compared, the statistic for the CTI Report will be stated in italics bounded by parenthesis and will usually follow immediately after the corresponding statistic from this Project.

1. Of the respondents, 38.7% (*64%*) were senior pastors, and 20.4% (*33%*) were solo pastors. The CTI Report grouped “others” together which accounted for (*3%*) of their respondents. In addition to senior and solo pastors, this Project included associate or assistant pastors – 29.2%; lay leaders – 3.4%; and other leaders (e.g., transitional, youth and music pastors, district supervisors, administrators) – 8.3%. Thus, the CTI Report was more focussed upon senior and solo pastors, whereas this Project covered a broader scope of congregational leadership.
2. Females make up 7.3% (*3%*) of the respondents, although only 14% of these women were senior or solo pastors. In both studies the sample of females is relatively small; however, this survey may provide a marginally better insight into a relationship between conflict and female congregational leaders generally.
3. Grouping ages according the CTI Report, this Project represented younger respondents overall. The proportion of respondents to this Project under 45 years of age was 40.8% (*17%*), 45-54 was 34.7% (*47%*), 55-64 was 19.8% (*28%*), and over 65 was 4.8% (*7%*). In part, these differences may be explained because congregational leaders in this Project included more than senior and solo pastors who may tend to be older.

²⁸⁷ The figure for senior and solo pastors for the CTI Report was 97% with the remaining 3% designated as “others.” These statistics refer to those who are currently senior or solo pastors, which may not be the same as the respondents’ positions at the time the conflict occurred.

4. The CTI Report indicated that median Sunday morning worship attendance in the congregations of the respondents was (193). There was insufficient specific data provided for this Project to calculate median attendance in the congregations. It is noted that the size of congregations in which conflict was directed at congregational leaders was equivalent for the two studies within their margins of error. Thus, it appears that there is no material difference between the two studies in the matter of the size of congregations in which conflict arose.
5. One factor that may contribute to some differences in the results of the two studies relates to general theological stance. In the CTI Report, (81%) of respondents described themselves as evangelical as opposed to conservative (47%), traditional confessional, charismatic, fundamental or liberal. This Project did not make these distinctions, presuming that substantially all the respondents were evangelical due to their denominational affiliation. This particular issue would have to be the subject of further research to obtain more meaningful data.
6. **In the matter of general congregational conflict:**
 - a. In this Project 96.2% (94%) of congregational leaders reported having experienced congregational conflict of any kind. The reported instances of conflict are virtually the same in the two studies.
 - b. 28.6% (38%) had left a pastoral or leadership position due to conflict, although this number rises to 32.4% when considering only senior and solo pastors. This suggests that fewer leaders in Canada who are currently senior or solo pastors have left positions of leadership in the past.
7. **In the matter of conflict directed at congregational leaders personally:**
 - a. When respondents were asked the question: “At any time while you have served in a congregation in some leadership position, have you experienced conflict directed at you personally from within a congregation?” – 81.7% (79%) answered in the affirmative, with 21.3% (13%) currently experiencing such conflict at the time of the survey. When the sample is limited to senior and solo pastors (as it is substantially

with the CTI Report),²⁸⁸ those reporting conflict directed at them personally were 87.4% (79%) with 23.2% (13%) currently experiencing such conflict. It is observed that leaders who are currently senior and solo pastors in Canadian evangelical English-speaking congregations appear to report significantly higher incidences of conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation, and of current experiences of such conflict.



One possible explanation for these notable disparities between Canadian and American congregational leaders in these categories is provided by Donald Posterski and Andrew Grenville. In a survey they conducted which was reported 2004, they observed large differences between Canadians and Americans in the matter of the relationship between Christian faith and church involvement. They noted that weekly church attendance in the USA was 38%, while in Canada it was 19%. They concluded that since World War II “Canada became a nation of believers, but not belongers.”²⁸⁹ They also observed a large difference when it came to responses to the question “How important is religion for guidance in my day to day life?” In Canada 43% responded with “none,” whereas in the USA that figure was only 21%. Perhaps these

²⁸⁸ As pointed out earlier, the respondents to CTI Report reported 97% were senior and solo pastors, and the remaining 3% were “others.” Although the CTI Report does not further distinguish this “others” group to allow comparisons, it should be noted that the comparisons made with senior/solo pastors in this Project are not quite comparable because of that 3% of CTI Report respondents. It is suggested that this relatively small group, together with the margins of error, allow for a satisfactory basis for comparison.

²⁸⁹ Donald Posterski and Andrew Grenville, “Like Thy Neighbour?”

<http://www.christianity.ca/netcommunity/page.aspx?pid=2770> (accessed September 21, 2011).

observable differences between Canadians and Americans in the realm of Christian faith and church attendance contribute to an explanation as to why conflict directed at Canadian congregational leaders is more prevalent and more current.

- b. The three most common causes of conflict directed at congregational leaders personally as claimed by the respondents were control issues at 76.0% (67%), leadership style at 50.9% (57%), and vision/direction of the church at 42.5% (52%). While leadership style and vision/direction are reported as less frequent causes, it is noteworthy that control issues as a cause of conflict is significantly higher, and style and vision/direction significantly lower, in the Canadian survey. These responses seem to indicate material differences between Canada and the USA in causes of conflict directed at congregational leaders.
- c. Given the similarity of margins of error between the two studies, congregational size does not appear to be a factor in the frequency of conflict directed against the congregational leaders. At the time of such conflict, the respondents reported that the size of their congregations were as follows: 30.9% (27%) were 100 or fewer; 27.7% (25%) were 101-200; 15.3% (17%) were 201-300; 11.9% (13%) were 301-500; 10.4% (12%) were 501-1000; and, 4.0% (7%) were over 1,000.
- d. Most leaders became aware of the conflict from members of the congregation. Although the data of the two studies is not easily compared,²⁹⁰ the CTI Report indicates that in 77% of the cases leaders learned of the conflict from congregants. This Project indicates that in 83.5% of the cases of conflict directed at leaders personally those leaders found out from within their congregations (i.e., a combination of congregant(s) [38.3%], and church board member or other leader [35.1%], and church staff [10.1%]).
- e. Some differences between the two studies were reported in the initial responses of leaders to conflict directed at them. The four leading responses in the two studies were the same, although in different order of reported prevalence: shock (47.7% vs.

²⁹⁰ The CTI Study invited respondents to check all categories that applied (e.g., congregants, and church board members, and church staff); this Project (Q19) asked respondents to select only one category (e.g., congregants, or church board members, or church staff). For this reason, a direct comparison cannot be made with the data available.

37%), defensive (39.8% vs. 53%), angry (34.3% vs. 51%) and overwhelmed (31.4% vs. 31%). Noticeable differences were also seen in other initial responses. For instance, confident was 23.5% (14%), and peaceful was 10.6% (5%). These responses may indicate a greater confidence in Canadian congregational leaders in the presence and process of conflict, as well as the concerns of the antagonist, because those leaders reported lower initial responses of defensiveness and anger, and higher levels of confident and peaceful.

- f. When respondents were asked in this Project how they dealt with, or attempted to deal with, conflict directed at them as congregational leaders, 78.5% indicated “directly with the other person or group in the conflict.” This was not a response available to the respondents of the CTI Report therefore affecting the ability to compare results of the two studies. Subject to this limitation, respondents in this Project used a formal public process in only 12.8% (23%) of occurrences, suggesting that Canadian leaders resorted significantly less to a formal public process for dealing with conflict directed against them. This Project indicated that only 22.7% (50%) sought counsel from outside resources. Although not directly comparable, these observations indicate that direct personal contact with an antagonist as a way of dealing with conflict is high in Canada (almost four out of five situations). These comparisons also suggest that American congregational leaders utilize formal public processes in response to conflict directed at them far more often than their Canadian counterparts.
- g. A comparison of the negative and positive effects of conflict on leaders in the two studies indicated similarities. The leading positive effect claimed was wiser at 83.2% (75%); the leading negative effects were damaged relationships at 57.5% (63%), loss of communication with person at 48.9% (39%), sadness at 52.1% (56%), and loss of trust at 48.9% (51%).

C. Some Cautious Conclusions

Making comparisons between the American and Canadian experiences of conflict directed at congregational leaders was neither the purpose for the CTI Report, nor the

primary purpose for this Project. However, some of the data drawn from this Project allow for some comparisons with the CTI Report. On this basis, some cautious conclusions may be proposed regarding conflict as experienced by Canadian evangelical congregational leaders.

There are sufficient comparable data to indicate that many of the American and Canadian experiences are relatively similar, particularly in the matter of conflict directed at congregational leaders. However, some potentially significant dissimilarities have also been identified. Three of these dissimilarities are noted once again. First, is that the incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders (i.e., senior and solo pastors) in Canada appears higher [87.4% vs. (79%)]. This type of conflict also seems to be more current in the lives of Canadian congregational leaders [23.2% (13%)]. Second, the leading reported causes of conflict directed at congregational leaders appear to differ in weight between Canada and the USA – control issues at 76.0% (67%), leadership style at 50.9% (57%), and vision/direction of the church at 42.5% (52%). Control issues as a cause of conflict appear more significant in Canada, and leadership style and vision less significant. Third, the manner in which Canadian congregational leaders deal with, or attempt to deal with, conflict directed at them appears to be different from those in the USA. In Canada there seems to be a higher rate of dealing directly with an antagonist, and a far lower incidence of resorting to formal public forums.

Although these observations and conclusions are subject to further research and analysis they do suggest that the experiences of congregational leaders in Canada and the USA are probably different in some ways. As stated by Posterski and Grenville “Our survey revealed distinct differences between the Canadian and American way of Christian life.”²⁹¹ One of those distinct differences may be in the area of how Canadians understand, respond to, and process conflict. Therefore, it should not be presumed that the Canadian and American experiences in Christian congregational conflict are the same.

Again, Posterski and Grenville conclude that “Canadians often look to America for models of effective ministry.... We think they have the answers. We forget the questions may be different. Given the clear differences between the faith experiences of the two

²⁹¹ Posterski and Grenville, “Like Thy Neighbour?”

countries, it is clear the challenge of encouraging Canadians to integrate Church and faith demands a ‘made in Canada’ solution. The challenges are here. So are the solutions.”²⁹²

It is suggested that this brief comparison between the experiences of conflict against congregational leaders in the USA and in Canada demonstrates some potentially significant differences between the experiences. The greater number of reported incidents of conflict directed at Canadian congregational leaders, as well as the continuing high casualty rate among those leaders due to conflict,²⁹³ should direct leaders to consider whether there are other and better resources for dealing with the conflict they experience. At least it should cause those leaders to pause before uncritically presuming that an American approach to conflict provides all that Canadian congregational leaders need.

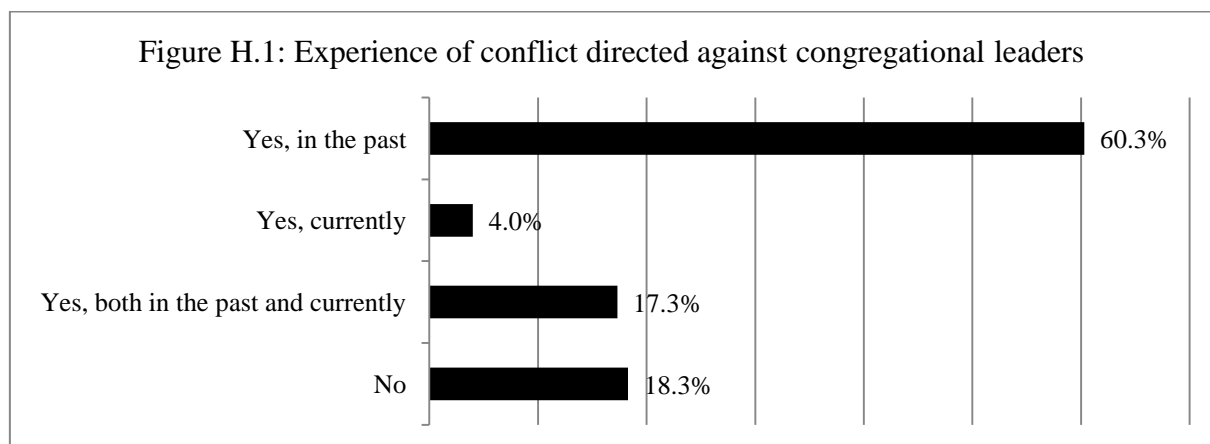
²⁹² Posterski and Greville, “Like Thy Neighbour?”

²⁹³ This was an important component of the problem examined in chapter one.

Appendix H - Some Observations of Variables in Conflicts Directed at Congregational Leaders

This appendix considers how changes in some variables may indicate when incidents of conflict directed against congregational leaders from within a congregation are more or less likely to occur. Consideration will be given to variables that include a leader’s position, age, length of service, gender, and congregational size. It is proposed that insights gained from these observations will add to a better understanding of such things as when such conflict may be expected and why it happens. It is hoped that this information will demonstrate the need for congregational leaders to prepare for the event of conflict, and to be equipped to respond to it more competently and wholesomely.

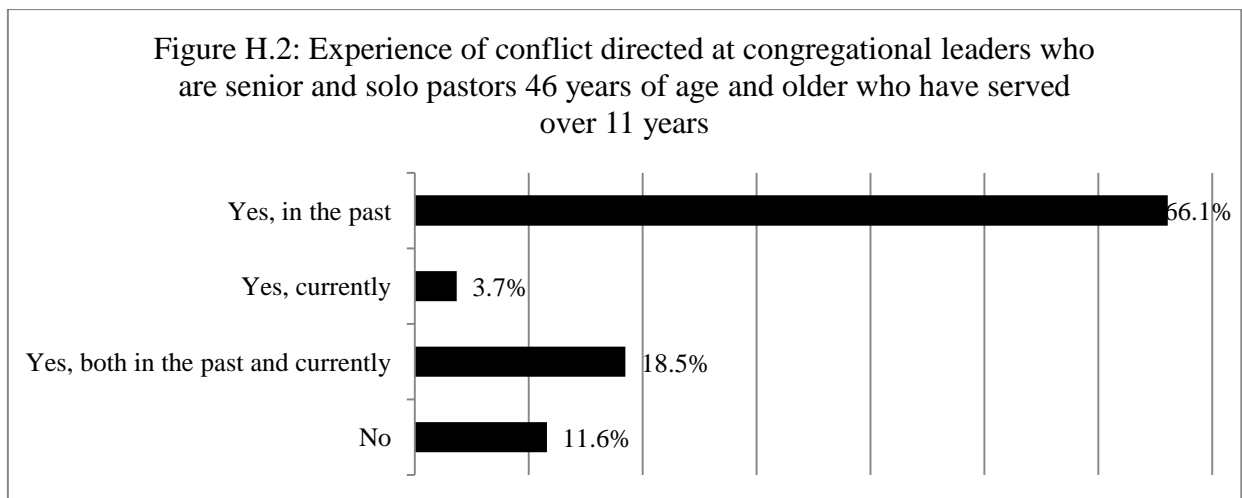
For purposes of this analysis, the main focus will be upon variables as they relate to responses to question 10 (Q10)²⁹⁴ of the survey. Q10 asked: “At any time while you have served in a congregation in some leadership position, have you experienced conflict directed at you personally from within a congregation?” (underlining in survey). Following the format of the CTI Report, respondents selected one of four possible answers: “Yes, in the past,” “Yes, currently,” “Yes, both in the past and currently” (i.e., more than one occurrence, and at least one of these is current), “No.” The percentage responses to each are shown in figure H.1.



²⁹⁴ (Q10) refers to question #10 of the Survey attached as Appendix E'. Where appropriate and helpful, the relevant question is noted parenthetically in the text.

Those congregational leaders who reported not having experienced conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation were 18.3% of the total sample. Those who had experienced such conflict at some time were 81.7% of the sample. Of those who had experienced such conflict, there were those who had experienced it in the past (60.3%); were experiencing it currently (4.0%); and experienced multiple incidents both in the past and currently (17.3%). From this it is observed that 21.3% (i.e., 4.0% + 17.3%) of respondents were experiencing such conflict at the time of the survey. Put another way, more than 4/5th of congregational leaders have experienced, or are experiencing, conflict directed at them personally from a congregation, and more than 1/5th of congregational leaders are currently experiencing such conflict. These are statistics for congregational leaders who continue to serve as leaders. How many have not remained in congregational leadership because of such conflict?

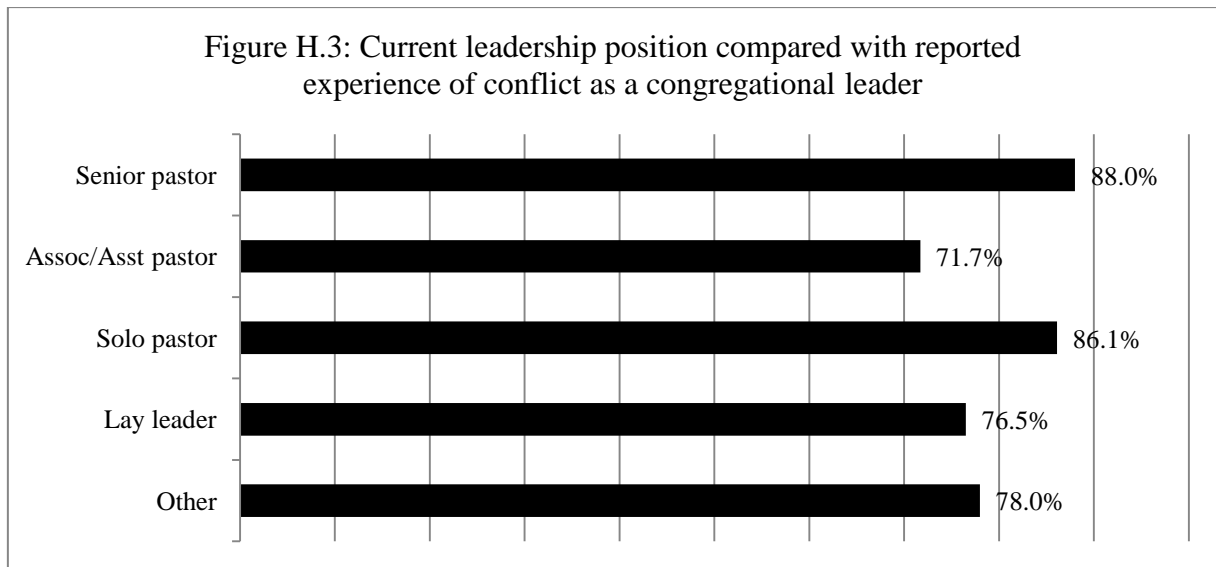
The research tool used to collect and store the data from the survey facilitated analysis by the use of filters. Application of a filter eliminates the data of a selected variable or variables from consideration, thus isolating the remaining unfiltered data. For example, choosing filters that remove data for associate/assistant pastors, lay and other leaders, and those aged under 46 years, and those who have served for 11 years or less, results in a data pool for senior and solo pastors who are 46 years of age or older and have served in a position of congregational leadership for more than 11 years. The results of this search are shown in figure H.2.



The data represented by figure H.2 indicate that congregational leaders with positions of senior and solo pastors within the selected age and length of service categories have a higher reported incidence of conflict directed at them from a congregation than the unfiltered total sample. Those who have responded with “No” declined to 11.6% meaning that 88.4% (i.e., up from 81.7%) of respondents had experienced this kind of conflict in the past and/or currently.²⁹⁵ The indication is that one or more of the variables of position, age and length of service appear to contribute to a higher reported incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders personally from congregations.

1. Position

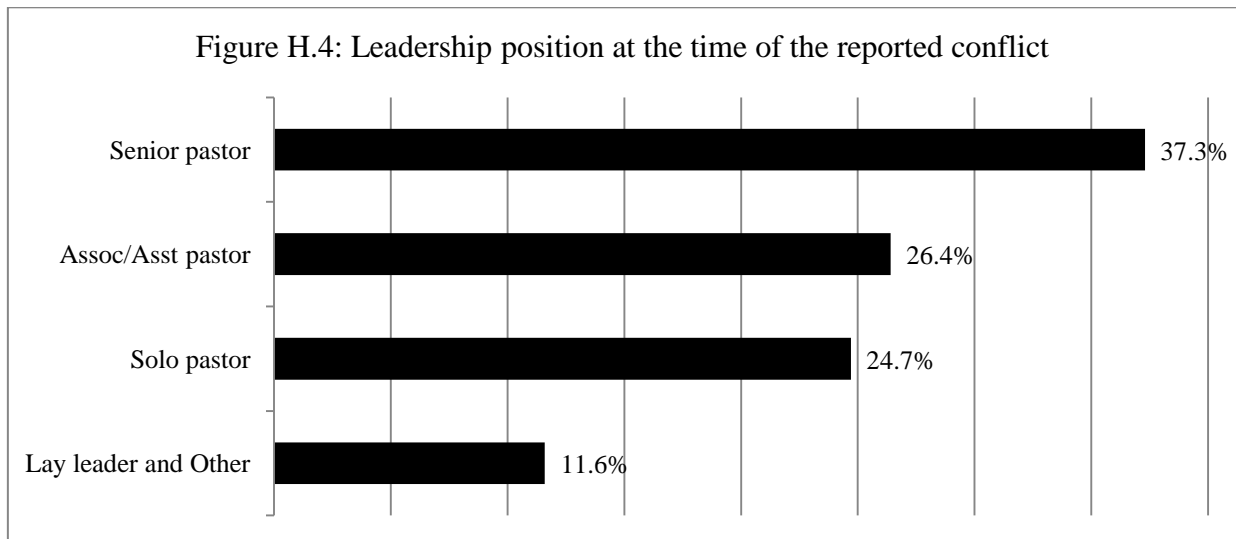
Even though each congregational leader brings his or her individuality to that role or position, the leader’s position or role within a congregation may be a variable that influences the incidence of conflict directed at a leader. Figure H.3 sets out the congregational leadership positions at the time of the survey (Q1) for respondents who reported experiences of conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation (Q10).



²⁹⁵ This example of a filtered sample of 189 (38.1%) of the respondents, and has some similarities to the sample of CTI Report, thus suggesting that the incidence of this conflict is higher for this Project’s sample of congregational leaders. The CTI Report indicated a sample composed 97% of senior and solo pastors, 83% of whom were 46 years and older, and 88% of whom had served more than 11 years.

It is to be noted that figure H.3 compares respondents' current positions at the time of the survey with the incidence of conflict at any time up to the time of the survey. Therefore, by themselves, these statistics do not demonstrate that conflict is experienced more or less by those in a specific role or position of congregational leadership. However, the statistics do indicate that congregational leaders experience a high incidence of conflict directed at them from within congregations. In particular, almost 9/10^{ths} of senior and solo pastors report at least one incident of such conflict.

Those respondents who reported experiences of such conflict were asked (Q14): "At the time of the conflict, what best describes the position you then held as a congregational leader?" Two of the response categories were "Lay leader" and "Other." Respondents selecting these categories were asked to specify their responses. Those lay and other positions included youth or children pastors/leaders (14 people or 32% of the aggregate of these two particular categories); deacons, elders and music leaders (12 or 27%); and, solo, interim/temporary/transitional and co-pastors (11 or 25%). In the following figure H.4, "Lay leader" and "Other" have been combined, although it is suggested that some of the responses may have more appropriately been assigned to the solo or associate pastor categories.



Although there may be a number of variables that influence this data, figure H.4 indicates that those in the congregational position of senior pastors are more likely to

experience conflict directed at them personally from within a congregation. Other possible influencing factors respecting senior pastors may include the lengths of service, ages and congregational sizes, all of which increase the opportunity for conflict.

At the least, these statistics indicate the high incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders from congregations. It seems reasonable to conclude that it is not a question of “if” congregational leaders will experience conflict directed at them from within a congregation, but “when.”

2. Age

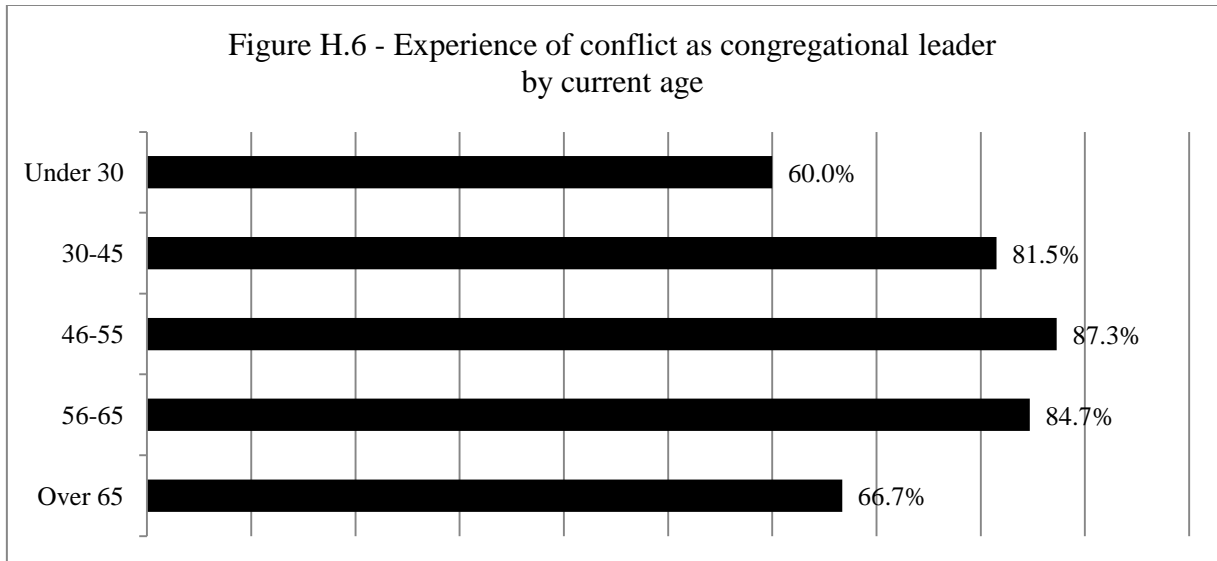
The variable of age appears to have an influence upon the incidence of conflict experienced by congregational leaders. The following chart sets forth the results of a comparison of current age with the incidence of reported conflict as a congregational leader. Table H-5 lays out the percentage of congregational leaders by age categories for those who reported the experience of conflict.

Table H.5 – Age of congregational leaders and incidence of conflict

Age (years)	% of sample	“Yes” (%)²⁹⁶
Under 30	9.1	60.0
30-45	31.6	81.5
46-55	34.7	87.3
56-65	19.8	85.7
Over 65	4.8	67.7

The incidence of conflict directed at congregational leaders according to the age of the leaders is shown in Figure H.6.

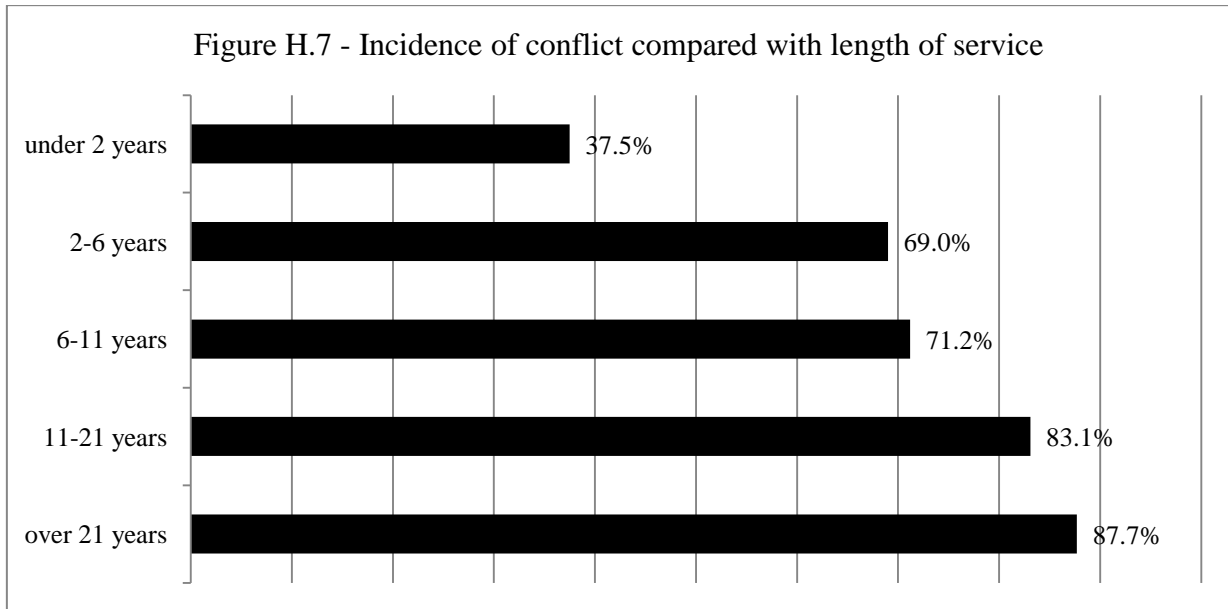
²⁹⁶ The statistic shown as “Yes” includes all affirmative responses whether experienced in the past and/or currently.



Only 60% of those under 30 years of age reported having had the experience of conflict directed at them as congregational leaders. This may be due to a number of contributing factors including less time exposed to potential conflict situations as congregational leaders. Over 80% of those in age groups from 30 to 65 years report the experience of conflict as congregational leaders. An anomaly occurs for those currently over 65 years of age. Only two-thirds of these respondents who continued to serve as congregational leaders after becoming 65 years of age reported having had the experience of conflict directed at them as congregational leaders. Many vocational pastors probably choose to retire upon reaching 65 years of age. Possible explanations for this statistic may include the possibility that leaders over 65 years of age who continue to serve have had few experiences of such conflict; however, it may also be accurate to say that they have leadership traits that do not attract conflict. This anomalous statistic will be considered more thoroughly in the next section dealing with the variable of length of service.

3. Length of Service

When the length of service of congregational leaders is compared with the experiences of conflict directed at them personally as congregational leaders, the results show that the longer a leader serves the more likely it is that he or she has experienced such conflict. This data is set forth in figure H.7.



As with the analysis of leaders' age, these findings are probably due in large part to the lengthened time during which there has been opportunities for conflict. A leader's role (e.g., senior or solo pastor) may also be a significant contributing factor to this finding. Figure H.7 does not reflect the anomaly of those who have not only served over 21 years, but also are over 65 years of age.

Of congregational leaders who have served over 21 years, and who were over 65 years of age, only 63.6% reported the experience of conflict directed at them personally as congregational leaders from within a congregation. Although there were only 22 respondents in this group, it is noteworthy anomaly because of their age and longevity in congregational leadership.

One possible reason for the longevity of service by this group of leaders is the lower incidence of conflict directed at them. The reason for this lower incidence of conflict may have a variety of explanations including the manner in which these respondents lead, and the environment in which they lead. Grace Chou may contribute two reasons for this lower occurrence of conflict. She proposes the possibilities that, first, "older clergy are probably more skilled in communicating with their members, which decreases the probability of conflict-related exit. Second, the perceived legitimacy of the clergy might increase with

age.”²⁹⁷ Although both of these explanations have merit, this author is unable to confirm this relationship as the survey did not ask the age or length of service of the respondent at the time of the identified conflict – data that is necessary in determining the relevance of Chou’s explanations to these congregational leaders. A third possible reason is provided by Edwin Friedman who observed that “Over the last ten to fifteen years I have witnessed a tremendous increase in the collective reactivity of religious congregations to their ministers, irrespective of gender or belief.”²⁹⁸ This indicates that there has been a societal or cultural shift in the treatment of congregational leaders; a shift that brings an increase in conflict directed at congregational leaders from within their congregations. Unfortunately, many of these leaders opted not to respond to Q27 regarding the identification of those factors they found helpful or beneficial to them personally in responding to congregational conflict.

Further research is needed to identify concrete reasons for the lower incidence of conflict for these older, long-term congregational leaders. If it is found that this lower incidence was more the result of greater societal or cultural respect for congregational leaders, then that would confirm Friedman’s observation and provide insight as a growing cause of such conflict. However, if it is found that these leaders had different ways of leading or responding to conflict, then there could be much learned for the benefit of younger and aspiring congregational leaders.

4. **Gender**

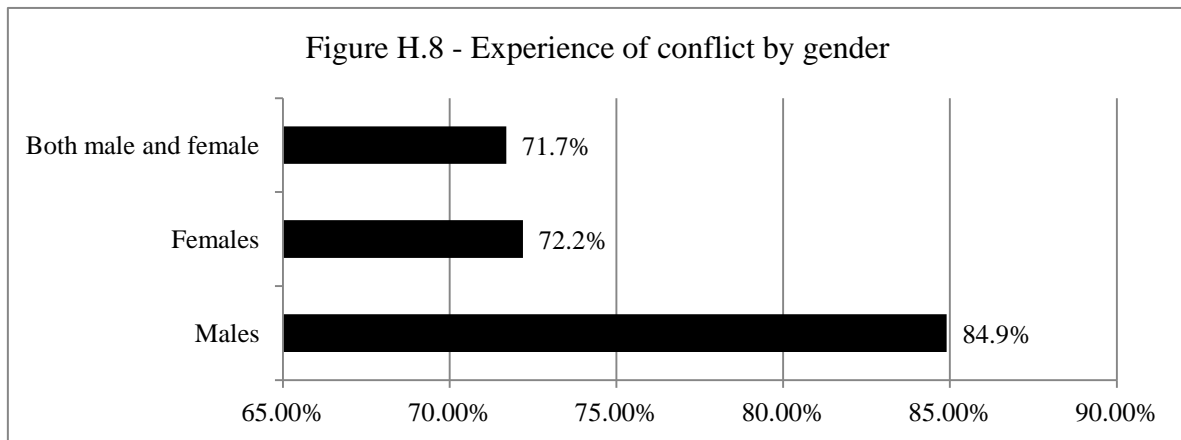
The variable of a congregational leader’s gender has significance regarding the experience of conflict when compared with that leader’s position. Females made up only 7.3% of the respondents. Of these, 13.9% reported they were senior pastors of multi-staff churches (i.e., 5.6% or two people) or solo pastors (i.e., 8.3% or three people), and 44.4% were associate or assistant pastors. Those stating they were lay or other leaders (41.7%) were engaged in ministries for children and youth, music, small groups, outreach and

²⁹⁷ Hui-Tzu Grace Chou, “The Impact of Congregational Characteristics on Conflict-Related Exit,” *Sociology of Religion* 69 (2008), 103.

²⁹⁸ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Seabury, 2007). Friedman died in 1996 before completing *A Failure of Nerve*. Therefore, the period to which he refers is from approximately 1980.

chaplaincy. Although this sample size is relatively small, some cautious observations may be made.

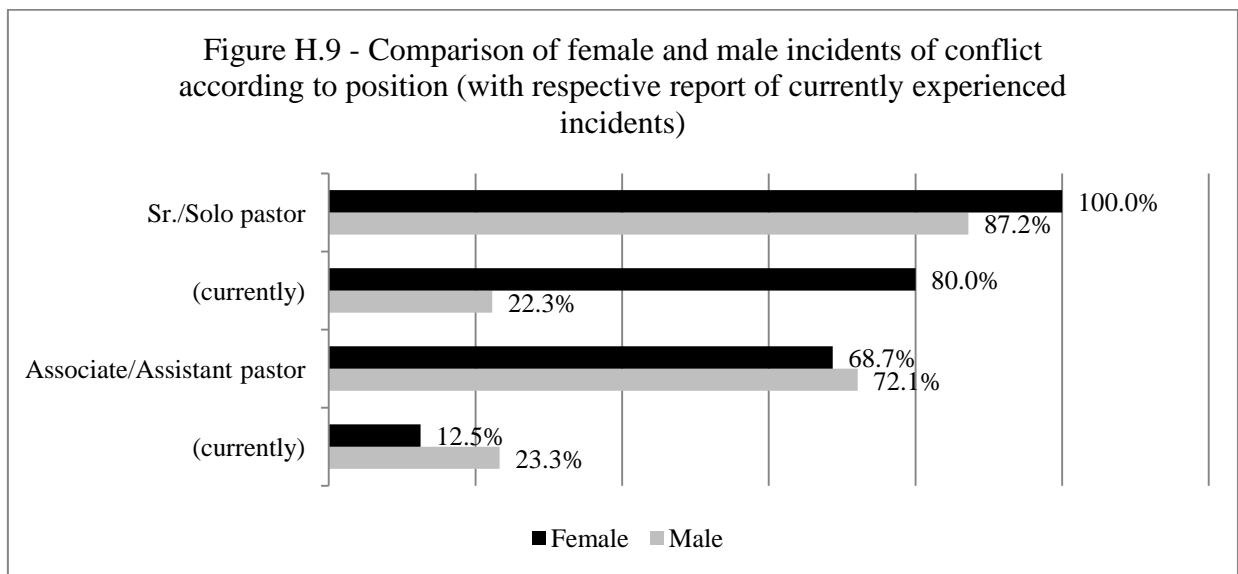
Overall women reported a lower incidence of conflict directed against them as leaders. As seen in figure H.8, 72.2% of all female respondents experienced conflict as congregational leaders from within their congregations, as contrasted with 84.9% of all male respondents. On the surface this would indicate that females experienced less conflict directed at them as leaders than males. However, when these statistics are examined in light of variables such as position, age and length of service, a different picture of conflict emerges.



When the experiences of female and male leaders under 30 years of age are compared, women experienced significantly less conflict as leaders than males of the same age (43.7% vs. 67.7%). When all positions are taken into account for ages 30 to 65 the occurrence of conflict increased for women relative to men (87.5% vs. 84.6%), a trend that becomes more obvious when only senior, associate/assistant and solo pastors are compared for those age groups (91.7% vs. 83.9%), especially for conflict reported as current (33.4% vs. 23.1%). When the variable of increased length of service is considered (six years or more) for the same positions and age groups, again females claimed a higher occurrence of conflict (90.0% vs. 84.8%) with current conflict reported as 30.0% as opposed to males at 22.5%.

As shown in Figure H.9, the greatest difference between conflict experienced by females and males appears to be attributable to the kind of leadership positions generally

held. When only responses from senior, associate/assistant and solo pastors are considered, reported occurrences of conflict directed against female leaders increased (76.2% vs. 82.5%). When only senior and solo pastors are taken into account female leaders experienced higher incidences of conflict than their male counterparts (100% vs. 87.2%), with significantly more of that conflict being current (80.0% vs. 22.3%). As the sample for these female leaders is relatively small, caution is needed regarding these statistics. These trends invite further research to determine the reasons for these significant differences in the experience of conflict, and the ways in which this issue can be competently and wholesomely addressed.



In conclusion, within the limits of a relatively small sample size, it is observed that conflict experienced by female leaders from within a congregation increases with age, length of service and position relative to their male counterparts. Therefore, gender appears to be variable that influences the incidence of conflict directed at leaders.

5. Denomination

Congregational leaders from five of the six denominations that participated in this survey reported experience of conflict as congregational leaders of the overall experience of 81.7% close to being within the margin of error (i.e., between 77.6% and 85.8%). Leaders

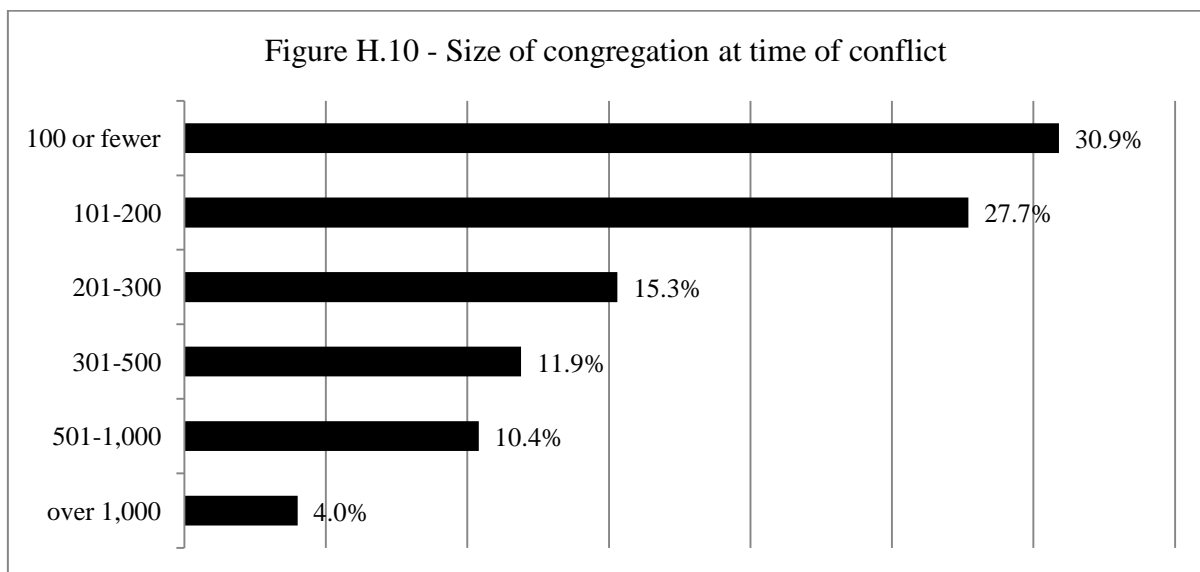
from the sixth denomination reported a lower incidence of such conflict; however, that denomination also had the fewest number of respondents, leaving this conclusion statistically uncertain. Thus the experience of such conflict against congregational leaders appears to be relatively similar among the participating denominations.

It appears that those leaders in an established denominational affiliation, for the most part, remained in that affiliation despite the conflict. Few of the respondents reported that they had changed their affiliation during their time of service as a congregational leader. However, variables such as the nature or intensity of a conflict may contribute to a decision to leave a denomination. This requires further research to provide greater certainty.

Reports will be made to the respective denominations at the conclusion of this Project with the ability to compare their denominational statistics with the overall statistics. For reasons of confidentiality, denominations will not have access to the statistics of another denomination unless obtained from that other denomination with its informed consent.

6. Congregational Size

Q15 reported the size of a congregation at the time of a conflict directed against a congregational leader. Figure H.10 sets out the approximate average worship attendance of a congregation at the time of a conflict.



Although these statistics indicate that more of the conflicts occur in smaller congregations, it also reflects that more of the congregations are smaller. A comparison of reported congregational sizes for each of the six participating denominations does not indicate a relationship that is significantly different than the incidences of reported conflicts. On this basis, there is insufficient data or certainty to indicate the influence of congregational size upon the likelihood of conflict being directed at a congregational leader from within a congregation.

Some Cautious Conclusions

Although there are many intriguing possibilities suggested by this analysis of data from this Project, much of it lacks a level of certainty to make helpful conclusions. Nevertheless, it is proposed that there is sufficient data to suggest relationships of some variables with the likelihood of higher incidences of conflict directed at congregational leaders personally from a congregation.

It appears that the longer a congregational leader serves the greater the probability of such conflict. The variable of length of service is frequently linked with a leader's age, although this would not necessarily be the case for those entering vocational ministry later as, say, a second "career." It also appears that the positions of senior and solo pastors indicate the highest incidence of a congregational leader's experience of conflict coming from within a congregation. This could be attributed to the seniority or exposure of the position; however, it could also be a result of length of service, or other variables. Needless to say, the longer a leader's length of service, and the more prominent his or her position, the greater the likelihood of experiencing conflict from a congregation.

An interesting anomaly was identified in those congregational leaders who were over 65 years of age, and who had served as leaders for over 21 years. Their reported incidence of conflict from within a congregation was significantly lower than would be expected based upon comparisons with other ages, lengths of services and congregational positions. Is this the result of different leadership skills, or is it due to an earlier societal respect for congregational leaders, or is it due to other factors? To obtain reliable insights into the reasons for this situation requires further research.

One other matter that was observed was the higher incidence of conflict directed at female leaders in more prominent positions of congregational leadership. Given the small sample size of this group, the data does not provide sufficient information to identify the reasons for this situation. Again, further research is needed for a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Overall, two general conclusions can be drawn from this brief analysis. First, the level of conflict directed at congregational leaders from within a congregation is high, and is probably getting higher. Second, for congregational leaders it is not a question of “if” they will experience such conflict, but “when.” As a result it is necessary for congregational leaders to prepare for the event of conflict, and to be equipped to respond to it more competently and wholesomely.

Appendix I - Excerpts from Responses Indicating Spiritual Formation

[**Note:** For purposes of identification and validation, each excerpt is immediately followed by parentheses containing a four digit number, and Q24, Q27 and/or Q28. The four digit number identifies a particular respondent. The excerpt was taken from the response of that respondent to one of three qualitative question numbered Q24, Q27 and Q28.]

- “My personal intimacy with the Lord was the source of my security and ability to continue to do my job” (3276 Q27).
- “The confusion was extreme. ... Prayer really did sustain us and a determination to do what was right in the eyes of the Lord” (3290 Q24).
- “... I think I have benefitted from the whole process in that it has made me more dependent on God and more conscious that He can use even little nothings like me” (3291 Q24).
- “God used the painful truth of a consultant to show me my sin and to lead me to public repentance. This provided the means whereby God began to work resolve in the whole body” (3295 Q27).
- “... I was confident God had a purpose for it, but ...” (3310 Q24).
- “... [to] where God has brought us, and in an odd way, we are thankful for the experience that God brought us through” (3311 Q27).
- “A deep and passionate relationship with Jesus Christ ...” (3313 Q27).
- “... relying on God” (3317 Q27).
- “... how God worked in David’s life through his ongoing conflict with Saul was both a purifying and strengthening point for me. I began to learn to leave my reputation with God. I cannot control or change what people will say of me or how they will manipulate and misrepresent things I have said. I can only leave these things with God and give myself to love and serve him” (3328 Q27).

- “... we surrendered to the sovereignty of God in that while I did not know about the future, He did” (3335 Q24).
- “The inability to tackle conflict and grow from it is symptom of ineffective discipleship and an inadequate understanding of what it is to be a disciple” (3357 Q28).
- “The reassurance from God that He would take care of me has proven to be beneficial” (3364 Q27).
- “God has a way of working redemptively through people and events if we are open to see him at work; it takes time to see him working” (3367 Q27).
- “It forced me to rely on God in a deeper way” (3371 Q27).
- “... the manner in which the Lord directed my complete openness and vulnerability ... concerning the conflict. ... the encouragement of this wise leader and the promptings of the Holy Spirit to approach this person” (3376 Q27).
- “... my attitudes and terribly intense personal thoughts would probably be more God honouring today” (3398 Q28).
- “I have been thankful to God for how He has used the conflicts in my life to refine and continually prepare me. Sometimes I think God allows me to experience conflict to simply draw me back to him ...” (3400 Q27).
- “The forcing of me into prayer and fasting and the discovery of the support given to me by God” (3406 Q27).
- “I came out of this conflict a much stronger person and am now very grateful for the experience. ... a much stronger trust in God.” (3447 Q24, Q27).
- “The experience has helped to shape us into the people and pastors we are today. ... I am thankful for the lessons I learned.” (3455 Q27).
- “... times in conflict I have totally learned, and grown from the situations, where I learned that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but principalities We need to have the ability to ... hear from the Lord. (3461 Q28).
- “I learned from that experience how to hear from the Spirit more clearly and separate my own way of responding to the situation from the way the Spirit wanted me to respond” (3463 Q27).
- “... [the conflict] was a growth experience for me” (3466 Q27).

- “God’s enabling power and discernment through the conflict” (3468 Q27).
- “Prayed through to the victory” (3479 Q27).
- “I knew He promised to help in every situation. I only needed to patiently wait His direction” (3483 Q27).
- “... made us lean more strongly on the Lord” (3488 Q27).
- “I feel as though God used the situation to lead me ... to a new place and new location” (3510 Q27).
- “I take it to the Lord and let Him guide me as to what and how to react” (3537 Q24).
- “God has done a work in my life and I see now that He used this for His purposes. ... All that being said, I believe that God brought me to where he wanted me to be and has used those events for my personal and ministry growth. My most fruitful years of ministry came after this time. We grow through our pain if we do not allow bitterness a place in our lives” (3540 Q24).
- “The Word has spoken and worship has led me deeper into an understanding of God” (3543 Q27).
- “... made me lean on the Lord more” (3552 Q27).
- “And as a result the ministry has flourished and the church is showing signs of new growth. This has proved that I must hang on through the conflict - the crucible of suffering - that God permits in order to help me grow my trust in His control” (3554 Q24).
- “... this required me to allow God to tear down parts of me that needed renovating” (3570 Q28).
- “Made me trust God completely for our family’s future” (3592 Q24).
- “I was able to pray it through and the church grew from there” (3599 Q24).
- “... I sensed a deep work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to remain sweet, open, vulnerable and transparent throughout the process.... In time God use this situation in our lives...” (3619 Q24).
- “It has also been a time when the Lord has been forming me into his image, forcing me to confront areas of weakness in my own life, leading me down the road of brokenness” (3630 Q24).

- “Conflict is a context for real relationship to happen if we learn to respond well and not see it as something that should not happen. I often told my congregation that conflict is healthy and natural when people are learning to live and work together. How we handle it determines whether we grow or die relationally. It is important to keep ones heart open and express hurt in conflict. If one is going to love one must risk hurt and allow hurt to be processed throughout the conflict. The only thing I could do better is each time to learn from it. Often fear is involved in conflict. Those fears must be explored. Fear happens when trust is loss and then control enters in, but faith, hope and love can trump fear and restore trust and even love” (3631 Q28).
- “I needed to learn something as I went through this. God does not put us through something without trying to teach us something. I have been able to see myself in a better light and understand how I react in different situations” (3636 Q27).
- “... I know this because I chose to trust Him. ... We continue to serve not despite the hurt, but because we were shaped to do so even within the hurtful season. Living a painless life is not a realistic expectation” (3638 Q27).
- “The grace and peace of God and helping me put the conflict into proper perspective” (3647 Q27).
- “I turned more often to the Lord in prayer for help, wisdom and grace” (3652 Q27).
- “Knowing that God was in control and relying on Him” (3659 Q27).
- “This conflict has helped me lean more heavily on the Lord” (3671 Q27).
- “I likely would have talked less to man and even more to God” (3672 Q28).
- “taught me to lean into God” (3679 Q27).
- “Prayer, my own pursuit of God in prayer...” (3683 Q27).
- “I believe the conflict assisted in my maturation process as a pastor and leader” (3700 Q27).
- “It did cause me to cling closer to the Lord as I realized it was more than just a human conflict” (3711 Q24).
- “the character of Jesus is more prominent today than seven years ago. The Spirit of Jesus is just precious right now and I think we have all learned to stay alert to the spirit of

division within the body ... I am grateful for the conflict in that it teaches me ...” (3713 Q27, Q28).

- “... a vision of Jesus as present, but not coddling, abandoning or criticizing ... I view my experience as a kind of childbirth process, necessary for a healthy church to emerge – praise the Lord it has!” (3745 Q27, Q28).
- “One of the first things I do is to take the situation before the Lord” (3765 Q27).
- “I believe that the Lord has allowed me to come through this and become more sensitive...” (3767 Q27).
- “This conflict pressed me to a close walk with Christ” (3786 Q24).

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Vita

John B. MacDonald earned B.Comm. and LL.B. degrees from the University of British Columbia after which he practised law for over twenty-five years until 2003. During those years he was bi-vocationally engaged in teaching and shepherding in various congregational and college contexts. He also has a Master of Christian Studies (Biblical Studies) degree from Regent College (Vancouver), is a Fellow of the Case Method Institute (Toronto School of Theology), and has engaged in courses in mediation and conflict resolution with the Law Society of British Columbia (Continuing Legal Education) and the Justice Institute of British Columbia.

Most recently John has served within the Jesus community know as Westminster Bible Chapel, Metro-Vancouver, Canada (2003-present). He is married to Sharon, and they have four grown children.

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