

Introduction

A major bequest, changes in worship, the addition of a preschool to your church building—all these things and more can spark strong reactions in individuals and congregations.

Each of us approaches life with a set of values and personal needs. When something collides with those values and needs, we react. As leaders in the congregation, we should never forget Isaac Newton's law that every action has an equal and opposite reaction—and the bigger the action, the bigger the reaction. This phenomenon seems to apply to organizations as much as it applies to physics.

To add to this, a change that seems small to us may in fact be monumental to a person struggling with health or personal issues. It may be their proverbial last straw and their reaction could be more volatile than we expected. In this case, the conflict may not be about us but instead about the struggles the other person is undergoing. We can learn to deal with situations like this in Christian love and compassion. That's the start of a stronger community of faith.

As the Series Overview indicates, congregations are a complicated mix of communities of spiritual formation, voluntary associations, and nonprofit organizations. We can be sure in any decision-making process that different individuals will prioritize one aspect of congregational life over another. That's a recipe for conflict right there.

Gossip sessions and impromptu caucuses that develop in the church parking lot after worship or committee meetings are warning signs. When communication goes underground like this instead of staying above board, there is trouble brewing. It's inevitable.

You may be experiencing conflict in your congregation right now or you may see storm clouds looming on the horizon. Whether your congregation is in the early stages of conflict or in the heat of battle, it's never too late to deal with controversy. While the general rule is that there is less damage in tackling the problem in the early stages, there is still much to learn in advanced situations of conflict.

The *Congregational Leader Series* seeks to build from strength. That's a challenge for us when we are in conflict, for it's hard to see the strengths when we are lost in our weakness and our confusion. It is hard to see our unity as the people of God when we are obsessed with our differences.

As people of the resurrection, we have faith that God makes all things new. God can and will raise us from the ashes of our human pride and inadequacies. God gives us new life and new hope through Jesus Christ. Hold fast to that promise at all times and find strength in the one who loves and empowers us to serve in Jesus' name.