

BIBM 645  
***MANAGING CONFLICT IN CHURCHES***  
3 Credit Hours  
Abilene Christian University  
**Spring, 2008**  
Dr. Charles Siburt  
January 24-26 and February 21-23, 2008  
Room #250, Faculty Commons, Biblical Studies Building

***Contact Information for Dr. Siburt:***

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***Office Hours:***

Monday	1:00-3:00 PM
Tuesday	9:00-11:00 AM 1:00-2:00 PM
Wednesday	9:00-11:00 AM 1:00-3:00; 4:00-5:00 PM

The mission of Abilene Christian University is to educate its students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

The mission of the Academic Division of Abilene Christian University is to plan, organize, and implement academic programs that focus on educating students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

The mission of the College of Biblical Studies is to provide leadership, preparation, and resources for effective worldwide ministry in the cause of Christ.

The mission of the Graduate School of Theology is to equip men and women for effective ministerial leadership in a variety of missions and ministry contexts and to provide strong academic foundations for theological inquiry.

The mission of the Master of Divinity degree (78 hours) is to serve as the basic theological degree, including a comprehensive program of studies designed to prepare students for a variety of ministries and to provide the foundation for advanced theological study.

The Master of Arts in Christian Ministry degree is to equip individuals for most church ministry roles other than preaching.

***Course Mission:*** The mission of this course is to prepare students for effective Christian ministry as conflict managers and mediators in congregations and other contexts in which conflict is a dynamic reality, particularly among Churches of Christ.

**Catalog Description:**

This course will offer an examination of the causes, arenas, and dynamics of conflict in churches with an introduction to five major approaches to intervening in conflicted situations. A variety of instructional methods, including lectures, case studies, roleplays, media, expert resource persons, and personal style instruments will be employed. **Course fee=\$30.**

**Course Description:**

The course will examine the multiple sources of tension and conflict in churches, the identifiable levels of conflict, the different types of conflicted relationships, the major arenas of conflict, the five approaches to intervening in conflicted churches, the diverse styles of conflict management, the details involved in serving as a consultant to churches in conflict, the implications of personality type and leadership and communication styles for understanding and managing conflicted situations, the applications of systems theory to church conflicts, and a variety of strategies and skills useful in the task of facilitating healing the wounds resulting from conflict.

**Course Textbooks:**

Halverstadt, Hugh F. *Managing Church Conflict*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991.

Kotter, John. *Leading Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 1996.

Rendle, Gil R. *Behavioral Covenants In Congregations*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1999.

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

Steinke, Peter. *Healthy Congregations*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1996.

Susek, Ron. *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999.

BIBM 645 Course Packet

**Attendance Policy:**

Since this class meets only on two weekends, missing one class meeting is equivalent to missing half of class. Students who miss any class will be responsible for all the material covered in that class session. Any student who misses one day of class meetings will forfeit one letter on the semester course grade. Any student who misses both class meetings will be dropped from the course.

**Course Policies:**

1. All work is due no later than the due dates designated in this syllabus. No assignments will be accepted after the due date.

2. No semester grade of "IP" will be granted for this course. No grade of "I" will be granted except in rare cases of serious illness, death of a family member, or a similar emergency. In such cases, an agreement must be negotiated with Dr. Siburt and documented in a written statement.
3. Failure to turn in any assignment will automatically result in a grade of at least a "C" for the course.

***Course Goal:***

The goal of this course is to prepare students for effective Christian ministry as conflict managers and mediators in congregations and other contexts in which conflict is a dynamic reality, particularly among Churches of Christ.

***Personal Objectives:***

My personal objectives are as follows:

1. To aid ministers in understanding congregations and other Christian organizations as systems.
2. To prepare ministers to recognize, assess, and respond strategically and constructively to conflict situations.
3. To enhance wise self-management and self-care among ministers.

***Course Learning Objectives:***

The objectives to be accomplished in the course are as follows:

1. To examine the multiple sources of tension and conflict in churches.
2. To identify the five levels of conflict in churches.
3. To recognize the different types of conflicted relationships.
4. To understand the five major approaches to intervening in conflicted churches.
5. To apply personality type, leadership style, and communications style theory to the phenomena of conflict.
6. To present the steps and skills involved in serving as a consultant to severely conflicted churches.
7. To train participants in the basic skills of case writing.
8. To offer strategies and skills useful in the process of healing the wounds resulting from conflict.

***Evaluation Criteria and Methods:***

The competencies which learners must master and the criteria by which mastery will be assessed are as follows:

***Methods of Assessment***

<b><i>Competencies</i></b>	<b><i>Assessments</i></b>
Learners must demonstrate the ability to...	Learners' performance will be measured by...
1. Know the multiple sources, causes, and theories of conflict in churches	1. Group analysis of teaching case studies in class; diagnosis in the written crisis case study

2. Identify the five levels of conflict in churches	2. Identification component in the written conflict case study
3. Recognize the different types of conflicted relationships	3. Recognition component in the written case study
4. Discern the influencing factors contributing to conflict intensity in churches	4. Discernment component in the written conflict case study
5. Articulate New Testament perspectives governing Christian behavior in conflict situations	5. Articulate in the theological component of the written conflict case study and in the final course project
6. Understand the five major strategies for intervening in conflict situations	6. Intervention component in the written conflict case study
7. Know the essential phases and skills of a relationship between a congregation and a conflict management consultant	7. Group analysis of teaching case studies in class; intervention component in written conflict case study; written procedures in final course project
8. Achieve proficiency in the basic skills of case studies and case writing	8. Group analysis of teaching case studies in class; written conflict case study

### *Classroom Virtues*

The GST invites students to participate in a process of theological and spiritual formation. Knowing how to think theologically comes by habit and by imitation, not simply by acquiring isolated facts. The assumption here is that books alone are insufficient for addressing difficulties of life and forming people into the image and likeness of God. Ultimately, we strive to form communities of inquiry, inviting you to inhabit a shared world of learning. Within such an environment, the goal is to cultivate critical skills of reflection, spiritual disciplines, interact authentically with one another, and learn to function as a community of inquiry. A large part of this involves connecting areas of life rather than pitting them against one another. Prayer, study, and other dimensions of life are all integral to the process of formation. Consequently, we invite you to participate in a set of practices; nurtured within this context, you pursue “intellectual, moral, spiritual excellence” the result of which is the formation of the whole person.

- I. Desire for truth in the context of love**—the aptitude to discern whether belief-forming processes, practices, and people yield true beliefs over false ones. People motivated by this desire will be more likely to conduct thorough inquiries, scrutinize evidence carefully, investigate numerous fields of study, consider alternative explanations, while respecting and caring for others.
- II. Humility**—the capacity to recognize reliable sources of informed judgment while recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the fallibility of our judgments. This is not created in isolation but takes into account feedback and correction from other sources of informed judgment.
- III. Honesty**—the capacity to tackle difficult questions without seeking simple answers. Ignoring complex and difficult questions only solidifies vices such as intellectual dishonesty, close-mindedness, and rash judgments. These vices preclude the possibility of refining our thinking and of participating in conversations with others.

- IV. Openness**—the desire to engage in an open-ended search for knowledge of God, including receptivity to different ideas, experiences, and people. Listening becomes a discipline that acknowledges the other and respects diversity. The art of being a student and a teacher is an ongoing process that necessitates hospitality, patience, and love.
- V. Courage**—the ability to articulate one’s position while considering other perspectives. The aptitude to express convictions involves risk yet fosters opportunities for meaningful dialog. Responding to objections entails tenacity but should not be confused with close-mindedness.
- VI. Wisdom**—the capacity to offer a synthetic discernment of knowledge on behalf of the community. The aim is not merely the dissemination of information but a pastoral implementation of faith for the building up of the community. It solidifies various pieces of data, practices, and experiences and aptly applies knowledge and faith to particular situations.
- VII. Stewardship**—the commitment to one’s accountability to the gifts and responsibilities that one brings to the classroom. Classroom engagement includes proactively participating in the course goals, seeking mastery of course competencies, and collaborating with faculty and fellow students in the developing of a learning environment. Committing oneself to spiritual and intellectual well-being and growth is a faithful response to the opportunities graduate education affords.
- VIII. Hopefulness**—the receptivity to the future possibilities of God. The cultivation of thankfulness for our heritages and expectation for our future ministries engenders a guard against cynicism and a spirit of perseverance during times of stress and disorientation.
- IX. Prayerfulness**—the making of space to commune with God. The task of learning and teaching so that we are formed into the image of Christ through the Spirit involves our consistent reliance on God’s sanctifying work.

***Course Format:***

The course format will be varied, including lecture, discussion, case studies, guest resource speakers, video and audiotapes, Bible study, a simulation game, and written reflection activities.

***Course Requirements:***

Participants in the course will be required to complete the following requirements:

1. Attendance at all class sessions.
2. Reading all assigned readings.
3. A book synopsis of either Susek's book *Firestorm* or Halverstadt's book *Managing Church Conflict*, due **Thursday, January 24**.
  - This synopsis should be 4-6 pages, typed and double-spaced.
  - A synopsis is a digested version of the contents of the book, a boiled down summary of the book.
  - After the summary, then give your own personal response to the book's perspectives. This is not a critique but rather a response stating how the book will impact your life and ministry.
4. A written *Conflict Case Study* (6-8 pages typed, double spaced) of an actual church conflict situation (in their own or some other church), due **March 31**. The Conflict Case Study should include the following:

- a. A brief **description** of the event/case. (1 page)
- The general identity (size, type, style) and context (location, social setting, cultural environment) of the congregation.
  - The person(s) involved in the immediate problem (change the names to preserve confidentiality).
  - The extent of your involvement, if any, in the case (your role in the church/in the case, relationship to other parties involved).
  - Any significant statements (verbal comments) or actions (decisions, behaviors, moves) that precipitated, ignited, or escalated the situation.
  - Any identifiable groups or polarities involved in the situation.
- b. A statement of the pertinent **background** to the event/case. (1 page)
- Any previous incidents related to this problem or situation?
  - Any previous flare-ups involving these same persons or groups?
  - Was this another episode in a long series of episodes?
  - What previous reactions or attempted solutions? Their results?
  - Any relationship between this situation and the congregation's overall story or track record?
- c. Your **analysis** of the dynamics of the problem(s) presented in the case. (2 pages)
- What social conflict theory dynamics are involved?
  - What Family Systems Theory dynamics are involved?
    - Who are the IP's (identified patients)?
    - How is homeostasis maintained in this system? What rules, roles, rituals, goals are evident?
    - Is a significant level of self-differentiation evident among any of the participants? If so, in whom?
    - What patterns of behavior are evident in the previous generations of leaders and members in this congregation? Are any of these evident in this situation?
    - What emotional triangles exist? Who are the chronic or repeat participants in these triangles? Which triangles appear to be at the core of the conflict?
  - What communications dynamics (personal or corporate) are involved?
  - What personal type or style differences (personality, leadership, conflict, communication, etc.) are involved?
  - What power dynamics (personal, structural, balance, distribution) are involved?
  - What parts of the problem are caused by "process" breakdowns?
  - What insights emerged from applying the diagnostic instruments used in the class (the Alban Institute tools, the scales of the Congregational Systems Inventory, etc.)?
  - What level(s) of conflict (1,2,3,4,5) is evident in this situation?
- d. Any **theological dimensions**, themes, or issues involved in the case. (1 page)
- What biblical issues or themes are involved in the case?
  - What scriptures or biblical themes are involved in the conflict?
  - What other biblical concepts should be involved in an

- intervention/mediation?
- e. A description of the **intervention** which has been/could be attempted by you or someone else. (2 pages)
    - What options exist for responding to the situation?
    - Should an outside consultant/mediator be contacted?
    - Who should take initiative and what should they do?
    - What positive steps could you or other leaders and members take?
    - If the case is about events in the past, what could have been done differently?
  - f. Your **evaluation** of your experience as a participant or observer in the case, including any learnings that will guide your ministry in the future. (1 page)
    - What would you do the same?
    - What would you do differently?
    - What additional knowledge or skills would you need in order to handle this kind of case better next time?

Note: **Only pertinent dimensions of the case should appear in your paper.**

5. A written final project consisting of a ***Congregational Conflict Management Model*** (due April 28), describing how you would propose to manage conflict in your congregation (present or future). This statement should meet the following criteria:
  - a. It should be 4-6 pages, typed and single spaced, ready for distribution to present or future church leaders and members.
  - b. It should apply the theories and strategies discovered in the course, plus any additional ideas of your own.
  - c. This plan should be written with both preventive (future) and curative (present) dimensions in mind.
  - d. It should include any central biblical/theological passages or instructions that you propose to serve as anchors for conduct in the church. (Matthew 18, Romans 14, Ephesians 4, Philippians 2 could be useful examples.)
  - e. It should include any specific ground rules you would propose for (a) establishing standards for appropriate conduct among leaders, between leaders and members, and among members in conflict situations, (b) for structuring group process (information-sharing, decision-making, communication, participation) in various contexts (elders meetings, deacons meetings, congregational meetings, committee meetings), and (c) for ensuring accountability among leaders and between leaders and members.
  - f. It should include specific guidelines for when and how third-party mediation should be used.
  - g. Possible formats for the plan could be to write it as a proposed policy manual for use in your church, or as an official resolution of the elders and ministers of your church, stating their specific strategies for dealing with conflict in the congregation.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Because of Dr. Siburt's vision handicap, your special assistance is requested. (1) Please submit a hard copy and (2) then email attach a copy of your paper to Charles.Siburt@acu.edu in Microsoft Word format.

**Grade Values:**

Book Synopsis	10%
Conflict Case Study	35%
Final Project: <i>Congregational Conflict Management Model</i>	55%

**Grading Scale:**

A=92-100
B=83-91
C=74-82
D=65-73
F=64-

**Special Fee:**

Due to the expense of the special self-awareness instruments provided for your use, it is necessary to require a **\$30.00** fee to defray the cost of these materials. This fee is stated in the graduate catalog.

**Course Schedule:**

The course will meet on the two weekends specified. Class hours for both weekends will be 1:00 PM to 10:00 PM on Thursday, 8:30 AM to 6:00 PM on Friday, and 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM on Saturday with some possible negotiated adjustments. The schedule for the class sessions will be as follows:

**First Weekend****Thursday, January 24****Class Session 1: Introduction to the Course**

1:00 PM	Introduction to the Course
	1. Introduction of Class Participants
	2. Introduction to Some Basic Theory
	3. General Dynamics of Congregational Life
	<b>(Book synopsis due)</b>
	Packet: Session 1

3:00	Break
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**Class Session 2: Reflections on Conflict in Churches**

3:15	Reflections from Charles Siburt
	- Halverstadt, Preface and Chapter 1
	Packet, Session 2

5:00 PM	Dinner
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**Class Session 3: Theological Perspectives**

6:30	1. Theological Perspectives on Oneness in the Christian Community
8:15	Break
8:30	2. Behavioral Covenants in Congregations
	- Rendle, entire book
10:00	Dismiss

**Friday, January 25**

8:30 AM	3. Case Study: <i>When Brother Takes Brother To Court</i>
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4. Analysis of Case Study
5. Video: *Conflict In The Church: Division Or Diversity*
- Halverstadt, Chapters 2,  
Packet, Session 3

10:00 Break

**Class Session 4: Systems Theory and Churches**

10:15 1. Basic Principles of Systems Theory

12:00 Lunch (Delivered to Classroom)

12:30 Complete Personal Style Instruments in Class

- 1:30 PM 2. Video: *The Abilene Paradox*
3. Friedman's Fables: *The Friendly Forest*
  - Halverstadt, Chapter 5
  - Steinke, Parts One and Two
  - Packet, Session 4

2:45 Break

**Class Session 5: Personal Style Differences**

- 3:00 1. Personal Style Differences: *FIRO-B, DISC, Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Delineator, Coping Styles Inventory*  
(The \$30 course fee covers the cost of these instruments.)
- Halverstadt, Chapter 3
  - Steinke, Part Three
  - Packet, Session 5

4:30 Break

**Class Session 6: Group Facilitation Skills**

- 4:45 1. Basic Principles of Good Group Process
2. Ground Rules for Groups
  3. Decision-Making
  4. Decision-Making
  5. Case Study: *Instruments To A Split*
  - Halverstadt, Chapters 4, 6
  - Susek, Introduction, Part 1
  - Packet, Session 6

6:00 PM Dismiss

**Saturday, January 26**

**Class Session 7: "Twelve Angry Men"**

- 8:00 AM 1. *Twelve Angry Men* Video
- Susek, Part 2
  - Packet, Session 7

10:00 Break

10:15 *Twelve Angry Men* Video (continued)

12:00 PM Dismiss

## Second Weekend

### Thursday, February 21

#### Class Session 8: Change and Transition Management

- 1:00 PM      1.      How Change Occurs in Churches  
                  2.      Managing Transitions  
                  3.      Kotter's Eight-Stage Change Process
- 3:00            Break
- 3:15            4.      Case Study: *A House Divided*  
                  5.      Case Study: *Holy Spirit*  
                  -      Kotter, *Leading Change*  
                  -      Dittes' material from *When The People Say No*  
                  Packet, Session 8

5:00 PM      Dinner

#### Class Session 9: Conflict In Your Church

- 6:30 PM      1.      Common Causes of Conflict  
                  2.      Early Warning Signs  
                  3.      Levels of Conflict  
                  4.      Influencing Factors
- 8:00            Break
- 8:15            5.      The Slippery Slope Model  
                  6.      Intervention Strategy Options  
                  7.      Case Study: *Subversion At Subville*  
                  Case Study: Almond Springs, Episode 3: *The Hymns Conflict*  
                  -      Halverstadt, Chapters 8, 9, 10  
                  -      Steinke, *Congregational Leadership*, Parts One and Two  
                  -      Susek, Part 3  
                  Packet, Session 9
- 10:00          Dismiss

### Friday, February 22

#### Class Session 10: Managing Crisis Situations

- 8:30 AM      1.      Preparing for Crises  
                  2.      Legal Liability in Congregational Crises  
                  3.      Crisis Management Strategies  
                  Packet, Session 10

10:00          Break

#### Class Session 11: Leadership in Anxious Times

- 10:15          1.      Anxiety in the Congregation  
                  2.      Healthy Congregations (Steinke video)
- 12:00          Lunch (Delivered to Classroom)
- 12:30 PM      3.      Leadership in Anxious Times  
                  4.      Leadership and Self-Deception  
                  5.      Dealing with Difficult Individuals and Minority Groups  
                  6.      Case Study: *We Can't Make My Daughter Do This*  
                  -      Steinke, *Congregational Leadership*, Part Three

- Susek, Part 4  
Packet, Session 11

3:00 Break

**Class Session 12: Collaborative Negotiation Skills**

- 3:15
1. Dynamics of Effective Negotiation
  2. Issues, Positions, Interests
  3. Polarity Management
  4. Stages in the Negotiation Process
  5. Aspects of Durable Agreements
- Halverstadt, Chapter 11  
Packet, Session 12

4:30 Break

**Class Session 13: Dispute Mediation**

- 4:45
1. Mediator Roles, Tasks, Skills
  2. The PAUSE Method
  3. The Four G's
  4. Stages in the Mediation Process

6:00 Dismiss

**Saturday, February 23**

- 8:00 AM
5. The GOSPEL Conciliation Process
  6. The Caucus
  7. Moving Parties to Agreement
  8. The Seven A's
- Halverstadt, Chapter 12  
Packet, Session 13

10:00 Break

**Class Session 14: Negotiation/Mediation Practice**

- 10:15
1. Class Role Plays
    - a. *Klausen vs. Simmons*
    - b. *"Lord of the Dance"*
  2. Peacemaker Vignette Role Plays
  3. Debriefing

12:00 PM Dismiss