

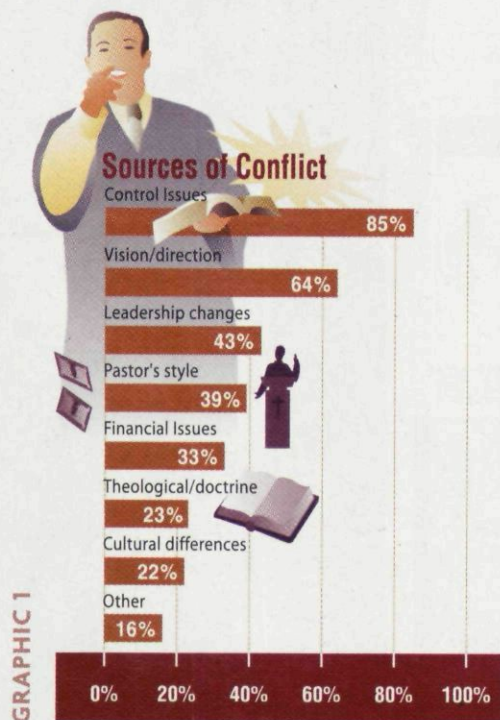
Church Conflict (Part 1)

The bad news about church conflict is that 95 percent of pastors have experienced it, and one-fourth are right now in the eye of a storm. The good news is that 94 percent say something positive resulted from a past conflict. A study conducted by YOUR CHURCH's sister publication LEADERSHIP reveals a lot about conflict in the church.

Who Knows About the Conflict?

In three out of four cases of conflict within a congregation, pastors learn about it through members of their congregation. Other common sources of discovery include church board members (44% of the time) and church staff (30%).

In nearly half the cases (46%), only a small number of congregants know about the conflict. Thirty percent of the time a larger group (but still less than half of the congregation) is aware of the conflict. One-fourth of the time either a majority or nearly the entire congregation knows about the conflict.

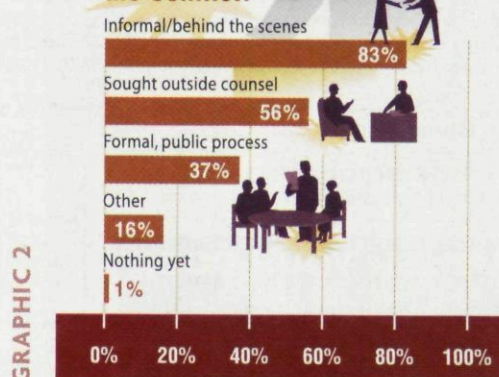


In churches with fewer than 200 congregants, news of the conflict spreads widely to a large group or majority of the congregation. In larger churches, it is more common for the conflict to be known by only a small group of people.

Sources of Conflict

While situations can be very complicated, our study indicates that 85 percent of all church conflict involves control issues. The second

How Did You Manage the Conflict?



most common source of conflict is related to vision for the church. Other key areas of conflict include leadership changes, the pastor's style, and financial issues. See Graphic 1 for the complete list.

Control issues are more common in smaller churches. Forty-nine percent of pastors from churches with under 200 congregants say that control issues are the single greatest source of congregational conflict, compared to only 31 percent of pastors from churches with more than 500 congregants.

How Pastors Respond to Conflict

The most common pastoral responses to congregational conflict are anger (51%) and defensiveness (51%). One-third of pastors say they were overwhelmed or shocked. Positive responses by pastors, such as being confident (21%), compassionate (19%), sympathetic (9%), or peaceful (6%), are less common.

In most cases, congregational conflict is managed through an informal, behind-the-scenes process (see Graphic 2). This is the experience of more than 80 percent of pastors, although over half (56%) seek outside counsel. A formal, public process is used by 37 percent of pastors.

The next Special Report will cover specific negative and positive outcomes of church conflict.

The Study

In spring 2004, 999 surveys were mailed and 506 were returned, for a response rate of 51 percent. With a sample this size, results are considered accurate to within plus or minus four percentage points.



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