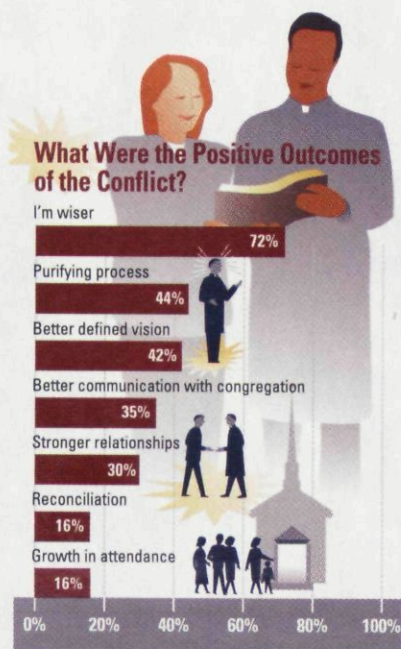


# Church Conflict (Part 2)

The fact that most churches experience conflict is undeniable. A study conducted by YOUR CHURCH's sister publication LEADERSHIP reveals that nearly all pastors recall experiencing conflict in their church and a fourth are in the midst of it now.

## Positive Results of Conflict

Can conflict be good? Ninety-four percent of pastors said yes. Generally, the benefits of conflict can be classified as a learning experience, or a spiritual encounter that was necessary to resolve a problem or bring



GRAPHIC 1

about healing (see Graphic 1). The overwhelmingly positive outcome for more than seven in ten pastors is wisdom. Other top benefits include a purifying process (44%), a better-defined vision for the church (42%), and better communications (35%).

When pastors were asked how they felt about the outcome of the conflict, encouragingly the top answer was stronger (60%),

followed by hopeful (35%), and thankful (32%). Another positive is that pastors who chose to stay with a church after a conflict were less likely to describe themselves as broken (15%) compared to those who left (42%). And pastors of larger churches were more likely to say they felt hopeful afterward.

## Negative Results of Conflict

On the down side, 93 percent, or nearly the same number that cited positive effects, also cited negative effects from conflict. The collateral damage from conflict falls in two categories. The first is a wounded congregation and pastor, as indicated by damaged relationships, sadness, loss of trust, and bitterness (see Graphic 2).

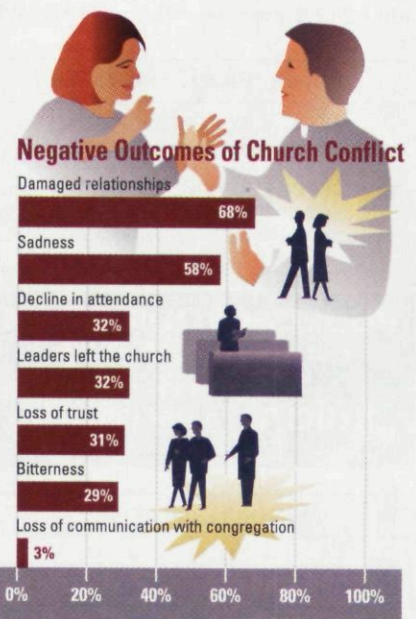
The second major negative effect of conflict is that people leave the church. In nearly four out of ten cases (38%) pastors told us they left, at least in part, due to conflict. Church leaders leave a third of the time. One-third experienced a drop in church attendance, which outstrips by two-fold the number of churches (16%) that see attendance growth as the result of conflict.

## Personal Impact on Pastor

Eight in ten pastors experienced conflict aimed at them individually, and right now thirteen percent are the focus of direct personal conflict.

When asked about their negative feelings resulting from church conflict, half of pastors felt angry (51%) or defensive (51%). A third felt overwhelmed (34%) or shocked (32%). And it's noteworthy that many remain broken (26%) and confused (16%).

Those who left a pastorate were less likely to cite positive benefits of the situation and more likely to cite negatives—particularly damaged relationships, lost of trust, leaders leaving, and a decrease in the church's attendance. They were also more likely to have feelings of bitterness, brokenness, and confusion about the situation.



GRAPHIC 2

Unfortunately, conflict is inevitable, no matter the size or affiliation of the congregation. Though conflict is the brunt of church jokes, it's rarely funny when you're in the midst of it or living through its effects that remain long after the fighting has ceased.

## 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 4 percentage points. **YC**

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