

Leading in Congregation and Community

by Paul Erickson, Agora

The people:

The students are mostly immigrant lay leaders from Lutheran congregations in various communities in Southeastern Minnesota originally from South Sudan. Most of them are literate, have decent proficiency in English, and have volunteered to participate, hopefully with the support of their pastor or ministry leader. It is likely that we will have 8-10 students in the class. I will be teaching portions of this class, and the remaining lessons will be led by Pastor Sarah Nietz, a local leader who is familiar with many of the Sudanese ministries.

The situation:

This class is being designed in response to requests made by various leaders in the congregations. Pastors have said they need additional leaders in their congregations, and many have said that they need help in navigating the many issues that arise in congregational life (leading meetings and making decisions, making budgets and handling money, managing conflict, and more).

The desired change:

Agora's purpose is "to strengthen the ministry of congregations that embrace the growing diversity of our society, helping lay leaders of immigrant and multicultural congregations become more effective as they teach, preach, and lead." In this specific course, the goal is for the participants to

1. Recognize that there are varying styles of leadership in the bible and in life, and that they become more comfortable and confident in using multiple styles, depending on their gifts and the needs of the situation.
2. Understand the ways that power can be used to build up or to control.
3. Explore a variety of ways to respond to conflict.
4. Practice using a planning method for making decisions in their community
5. Develop an ability to

The place:

We will meet at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Austin, MN, in a classroom with moveable tables and chairs.

The time:

The class will meet for three sessions on Saturdays (March 12, April 16, and May 21). We begin with worship, then move into three hour-long class sessions, with time for breaks, lunch, and closing announcements.

Leading in Congregation and Community

The Content

The Achievement-Based Objectives

By the end of the session, the participants will have:

Five C's: leadership styles

-Evaluated their own comfort levels with the five types

-Matched the styles with various situations

-Written a plan for trying on a new behavior

Power analysis

-Analyzed the system of power operative in their communities

-Compared power in the kingdom of God to power in the world as we know it

Conflict resolution

-Named the different sources of and responses to conflict, in scripture and in life

-Identified core principles of conflict resolution

-Experimented with conflict resolution styles in a game

-Engaged in role plays to act out possible conflicts and responses

-Identified new behaviors they could adopt

Making decisions in community

-Analyzed examples of group decision-making in the bible

-Learned and practiced a new planning guide for community decision-making

Using resources for God's mission

-Explored a broadened definition of resources

-Articulated lessons learned from the story of the manna

-Connected a biblical view of resources with life in their community

-Articulated public commitments of how they will integrate their learnings into community life

Session One: March 12, 2016

Welcome and Overview

First Hour: Introductions, examples of leaders

Please introduce yourselves to the group:

1. Name
2. Congregation/community
3. Your role in the congregation/community

In groups of three or four, please discuss these questions:

- *What challenges do you currently have in your congregation?*
- *What are you trying to change or accomplish in your congregation?*

After 10-15 minutes, we will hear a few responses.

This is a course that will focus on leading in congregation and community. We will use the following definition of leadership: "Leadership is a process of social influence which works to increase the efforts of others in pursuit of a common goal." Leadership is called upon when a community is responding to a problem or challenge and seeking a resolution or solution. There are many different ways to lead, and each of us may use various styles, based on our gifts and the situation we are in.

Take a few minutes to think about someone who is an example of a good leader. It could be someone you know personally, a public figure alive today, or a historical or biblical figure.

- *What challenge were they responding to?*
- *What change did they effect?*
- *Whom did they lead?*
- *And, most importantly, how did they lead?*

Find one other person and describe this leader. We'll then hear some examples from the group.



Quote-Big.net

Second Hour: Leadership Styles

There are dozens of examples of leadership in the Bible, and dozens of different styles. We're going to take a look at one leader, the Apostle Paul, and five styles that he used. Let's take turns reading each style and the accompanying text aloud:

Five Leadership Styles

Coerce ("Do this because I say so, or else...") I Corinthians 4:19-21 "But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?"

Convince ("I have a great idea") Acts 28:23-24 "After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe."

Collaborate ("We all need to work together") Ephesians 4:15-16 "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."

Coach ("Try this; I know you can do it") I Corinthians 11:1-2 "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you."

Coax ("Please do this; I really need you to help") Ephesians 4:1-3 "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Leading in Congregation and Community

If leadership is about change, and change requires power, it may be helpful to think about where the power lies with each leadership style.

- Coerce: power is in me as the leader
- Convince: power is in the idea
- Collaborate: power is in us together
- Coach: power is in you, and I need to draw it out
- Coax: power is in you, and I beg you to use it

What other leadership styles are you aware of? Let's list them on the newsprint. Do they align with any of these five? Think for a few moments about which of these styles feels most comfortable for you. Which one is your "go-to" style? Rank them in order, 1-5, of your comfort with them.

These five styles are posted on signs around the room. As we begin, go to the style that best describes the way you generally lead. As you hear each of the following scenarios described, move to the style which you think would be the most effective for that situation. After people have moved, we'll hear a few comments from folks as to why they chose the style that they did.

Six Scenarios to Consider

1. It's 3:00 am, and there's a fire in your home. Your family is asleep and you need to get them out.
2. The congregation/organization you belong to has received a million dollars, and you need to spend it by the end of the year.
3. You're working with a group of young people and they are in charge of designing and leading a worship service next month.
4. The congregation/organization is losing members and you need to develop a plan to change this.
5. There has been a number of violent incidents in the neighborhood, and members of the community aren't sure how to respond.
6. The treasurer of your congregation/organization has retired after 30 years, and you need to find a replacement.

Leading in Congregation and Community

Let's take a few minutes to talk about this exercise:

- *Was it easy to pick a leadership style each time?*
- *How many different styles did you move to?*
- *Are there other scenarios you can imagine needing to respond to?*

There is a common American expression, "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." It's helpful to recognize that leaders need a whole toolbox, filled with different tools, so that you can choose the right tool (leadership style) for the situation.



Take a few minutes to think about the tools that God has given you to lead. Are you a good listener? Do you have a strong voice or a good sense of humor? Are you good at getting people to work together; are you a patient teacher? Write labels on the tools in the figure above describing some of the leadership gifts that you already have. Outside the tool box, write words to describe gifts that you don't yet have and perhaps would like to develop.

Third Hour: Pyramids and Circles of Power

One of the most important considerations in leading a congregation or community is the use of power. When you hear the word “power,” what comes to mind?

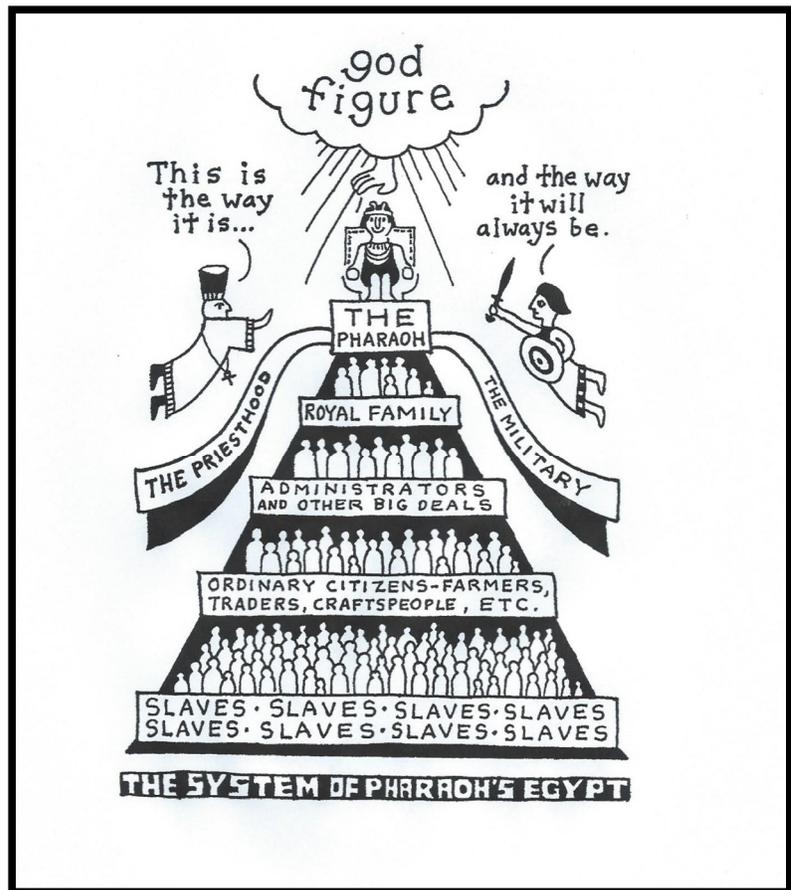
For our purposes, we will use a simple definition of power, which is “the ability to act.” Power is simply being able to get things done. In the Spanish language, this relationship is quite clear because the word for power, “poder,” also means “to be able.”

- *What kind of words do you have in your language for power?*
- *What are some examples of people who use power in a good way and those who use it in a destructive way?*

While the bible contains many different ways to understand power, and many people who are powerful and use their power in different ways, we are going to look at two basic ways that people use power: power over and power in.

One graphic way to picture this is in the pyramid. In ancient Egypt, we know that the pharaohs were buried in pyramids, many of which still exist to this day. But the pyramid was not only a tomb, it was an accurate description of how power was used in that society and in many societies throughout history, including today. Take a look at the power structure of Egyptian society in this figure

(From *Manna and Mercy*, Dan Erlander, ©1992, p. 4):

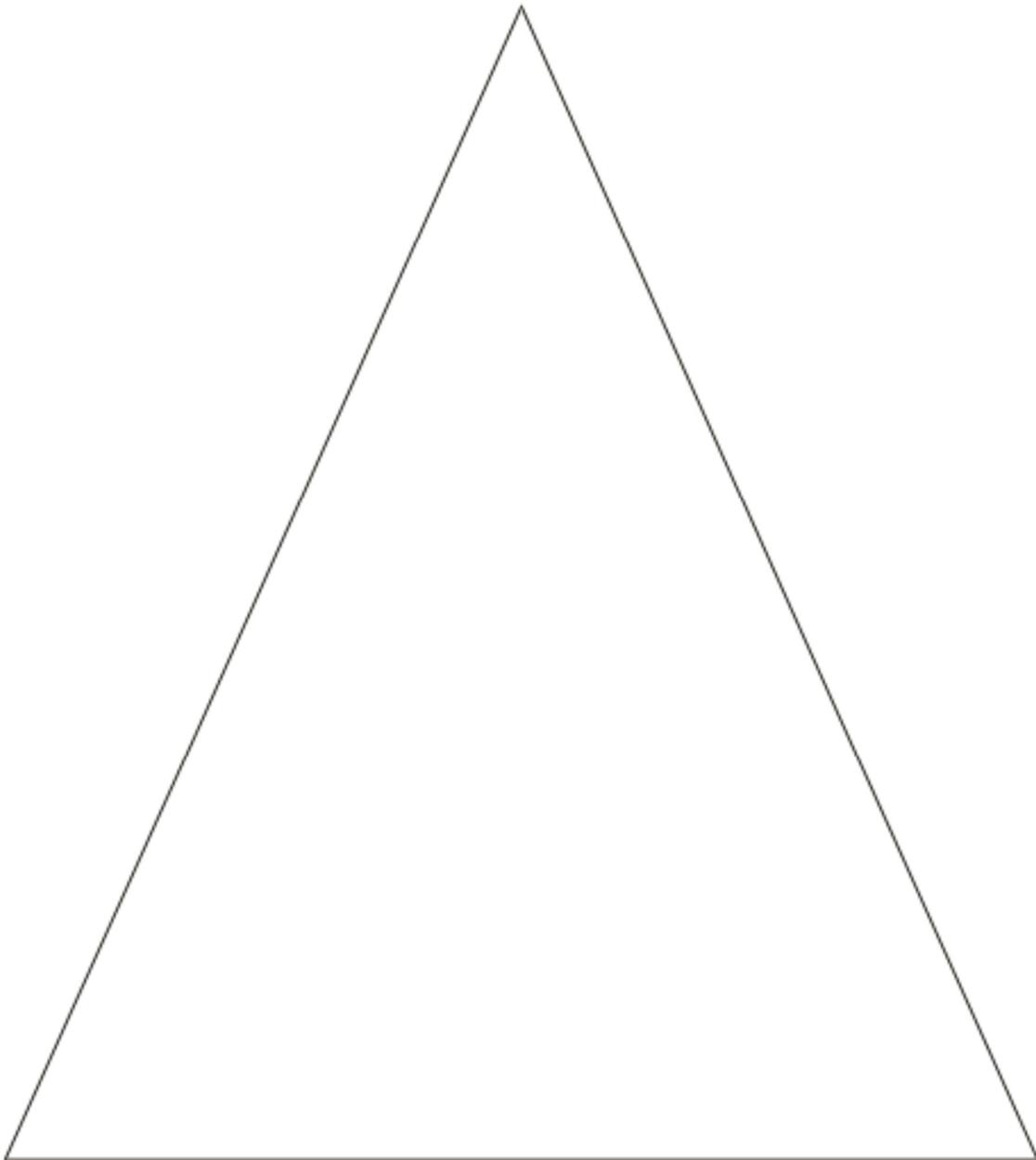


Leading in Congregation and Community

This pyramid structure could also describe the Kingdom of Israel under the kings, the Roman Empire in the days of Jesus, and other societies.

- *How is power used in this system?*
- *How do those on the top get things done?*
- *What is the goal of life in this structure?*

The pyramid of power is still used today, in our nations, our communities, and in our churches. Please fill out a pyramid of power in your congregation or community on the following page. After taking five to ten minutes, we will share some examples with the group.



Leading in Congregation and Community

Most of us are used to systems of power based on the pyramid, in which some have power over others. In the kingdom of God, however, there is a different understanding of power, in which there is power in relationships, power in community. Let's take a look at two texts that describe how God wants us to understand and use power

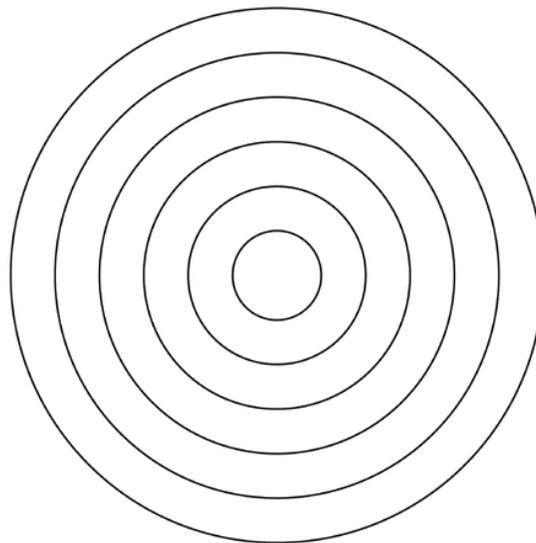
- Luke 1:46-55
- Luke 22:24-26

Divide into groups of three or four, and discuss these questions (10 minutes):

- *Based on these texts and others that you are familiar with, what does it mean to have power in the kingdom of God?*
- *In the kingdom of God, who has power? What is power for? How should power be used?*

Let's hear a few comments from the groups.

It may seem like God inverts the pyramid, putting those on the bottom on the top so that they can rule over those who used to be on top. Instead, God flattens the pyramid, meaning that no one is closer to God, and no one is to lord it over anyone. Instead of a pyramid, power in the Kingdom of God could be imagined more like a series of concentric circles:



In this understanding, no one is on top, closer to God, as God connects to all parts of the circle, and power resides in all of the circles. In the kingdom of God, there is still an important role for leaders, but their role is more one of organizing and coordinating than directing and controlling.

Let's take a look at the differences in how power is understood and used in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world on the Power Analysis Grid on the following page. After talking through the first two categories, take a few minutes and fill in the grid, using your culture of origin and the culture in which you are currently living. After completing the grid, we will form small groups to share our work and then discuss the following questions:

- *Who has more power in your congregation?*
- *Who has more power in your community?*
- *How does age, race, and gender factor in to power?*

Let's hear a few comments from the group.

Takeaway

Take a few minutes and reflect on the leadership styles we have discussed, and look again at your ranking of the five styles. Then look at the toolbox figure and the tools you would like to develop. Choose a style that is not listed number one, or a tool that you would like to develop and imagine a scenario in which you could use it. Write out two or three things you could do or say to develop this tool or lead in this way.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Power Analysis Grid

	Kingdom of this world	Kingdom of God	Culture of Origin	Culture you are living in today
Structure of power	Pyramid	Concentric Circles		
How is power gained?	Money, force, age, race, gender, education/status	Sacrificial love, Holy Spirit, organizing the Body of Christ		
How is power maintained?	Fear (enemy out there, chaos within)	Hope, love (we can do more together)		
What is power for?	Control, order, stability	To change the world, increase justice, equality, unity		
What is the goal of life?	Survival; to climb the pyramid, to be on top	To stay connected and unified so that all may live		

Session Two: April 16, 2016

Warmup

Please introduce yourselves to the group:

- Name
- Congregation/community
- Your role in the congregation/community

In groups of three or four, please discuss these questions:

- *Were you able to try a different style of leadership since the last class?*
- *How did it go?*
- *How have you noticed power being used in your community? Which system did it follow, power over or power in?*

Fourth Hour: Naming the Conflict

Question for the group: In general do you think that conflict is good or bad?

Discussion: I tend to think that conflict is neither good nor bad, it's just a part of life. The only way to avoid conflict is to be dead. The bible is full of examples of conflict, and we will take a look at a few examples.

Please find a partner, open your bibles and I will assign a bible text to each pair. Please read the text, and discuss the conflict that appears in the story. After 10 minutes, one of you will present the text to the whole group, describing the situation and responding to these questions:

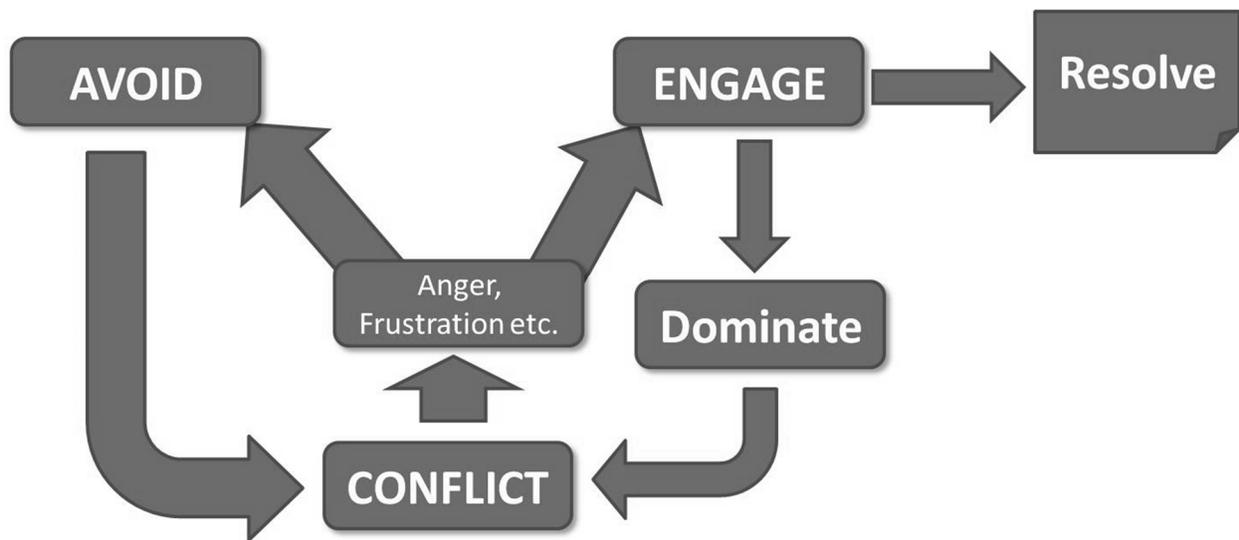
- *What kind of conflict is it? Between individuals, among two groups, or between one person and a group?*
- *What is the conflict about? Or, what is the reason for the conflict?*
- *How was power used in this conflict?*
- *How did they respond to the conflict?*

Biblical Stories of Conflict

- Genesis 3:1-19
- Genesis 18:16-33
- 2 Samuel 12:1-15
- 1 Kings 3:16-28
- Jonah 3:10-4:10
- Matthew 21:23-27
- Mark 10:35-45
- Mark 14:32-42
- Luke 22:24-30
- John 2:13-22
- John 8:1-11
- Acts 15:1-21
- Acts 15:36-41
- Romans 7:14-25
- 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Leading in Congregation and Community

In reality, we can see that the bible is full of conflicts of all types, and what is good or bad is not the conflict itself, but how we respond to the conflict. We can pretend that the conflict doesn't exist, and pray that a resolution falls from the heavens; we can respond in a way that makes the conflict worse or deeper; we can respond in a way that tries to resolve the conflict quickly in order to avoid dealing with it; or, we can use the conflict in a way that strengthens our relationships and deepens our understanding of the other people in the conflict. This is my hope for this class, that we can look at conflict as an opportunity, and maybe even a gift, because going through conflicts is the way in which we can build stronger communities. In the second hour, we are going to look at where conflicts come from so that we can better understand how to respond.



Fifth Hour: Engaging the Conflict

Opening questions for discussion:

1. *What are the most common conflicts in your experience?*
2. *Which conflicts are the most difficult to resolve?*
3. *What are some of the differences you have observed in how different cultures respond to conflict?*

There are several principles that we can remember and affirm, which can be applied to almost every conflict. Please form groups of three or four people, and read the assigned passage and answer this question:

- *What is the core message of this passage?*

After 10-15 minutes, we'll ask each group to summarize the meaning of each passage in their own words.

- Matthew 5:21-24
- Romans 3:21-26
- Ephesians 4:14-16
- Ephesians 2:19-22
- Acts 15:36-41
- Matthew 18:15-22
- Matthew 5:43-45
- James 1:19-20

Activity

We're going to play the game of knots. I need you to form two groups, and put yourselves in a circle. Now, each person needs to cross their arms and reach across the circle, taking a hand of another person in each of their hands. You can't take the hand of a person standing next to you, and you can't take both hands of another person. Now, you are all tangled into a knot. Each group needs to find a way to untangle the knot without letting go of the hands that you are holding, until the group is in a circle (or, in some cases, two circles).

After doing this several times, then perhaps once as a large group, we will discuss the following questions:

- *What this easy or difficult?*
- *How did you resolve this conflict, or how did you untangle the knot? Was there a single leader, or did you work as a group?*
- *Were there different ideas about what to do? How did you resolve that conflict?*
- *What principles did you use to resolve this problem?*

Sixth Hour: Role Plays

Now we are going to divide up into groups of four to six persons, and I would like each group to create a short drama about a conflict in a community. Every person should have a role in the drama; maybe two people are fighting about something, and they come to a third person to resolve it. Maybe there is a discussion in a group, and there are two or three options for what to do, and the group has to decide. You need to decide what kind of situation you would like to portray, what role each person has, and how you are going to resolve or try to resolve the conflict. You have 15-20 minutes to decide and practice your drama, and then we will present them to the whole group, discussing what we have seen and what we have learned.

After each drama is presented, we will discuss these questions:

- *How did that go?*
- *What did you think of the drama?*
- *How did they resolve the conflict?*
- *Do you have any suggestions for the group?*

To the group that presented the drama:

- *How was the process in your group?*
- *Was there any conflict in your process?*
- *How did you resolve it?*

Takeaway

Think of a recent conflict you have been involved in. What caused it? How did you respond? What was the result? Now imagine that you are facing a similar situation in the coming weeks. What three things could you feel, think, or do differently as a result of what we have discussed today? List them here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Session Three: May 21, 2016

Warmup

Please introduce yourselves to the group:

- Name | Congregation/community | Your role in the congregation/community

In groups of three or four, please discuss these questions:

- *What kinds of conflict have you experienced in recent weeks?*
- *What are some of the things that you have done or seen others do that have made the conflict worse?*
- *What are some of the things that have helped resolve the conflict?*

Seventh Hour: Making Decisions as a Community-Process

If we agree that leadership is not just telling others what to do but instead working together to respond to problems or to reach our goals, we need to develop a process to do this.

Let's take a look at Acts 6:1-7 to see how the disciples made a decision.

- *What was the problem?*
- *How did the apostles respond? What did they do? What didn't they do?*
- *Who elected the deacons? How did they decide?*
- *How did things turn out?*

Now let's take a look at how our communities and congregations make decisions. Think of a recent experience in your community in which a decision needed to be made, and answer the following questions:

- *What was the problem or need?*
- *Who brought the issue to the group?*
- *How was a decision made?*

It's also important to remember that the job of the leader may not be to decide who is right and who is wrong, or to simply answer the questions or solve the problems of a community, but to ask the questions that focus the conversation toward the things that maintain the unity of vision and purpose while respecting the diversity of opinions, gifts, and jobs. Let's read Ephesians 4:1-16 in groups of three or four, and discuss these questions:

- *In what ways are we united?*
- *In what ways are we diverse?*
- *How can a leader help all parts of the body work together?*

Eighth Hour: Making Decisions as a Community-Practice

Let's take a look at the Planning Guide, a process for making decisions as a community. This is a process that can be used any time your community needs to organize to respond to a problem or to accomplish a goal.

1. **Values.** To begin, we need to look at the center, to our values. We want to make sure that everything we do as a community comes out of and supports the values we hold. We may have larger values ("to proclaim God's love" or "to strengthen our community") and we may have smaller values that apply to a specific project ("to develop new leaders" or "to help our youth understand and appreciate their culture"). Whatever the case may be, it is helpful to start with WHY. What is important to us? As we go forward, it is helpful to keep these values in our minds so we don't lose sight of them.
2. **Goals.** The next phase is to go to the top of the page, to the goals and objectives. What is it that we want to accomplish? What will it look like when we are done? It is helpful if it is specific and clear ("we want to raise \$1,000 for the church" or "we want to welcome five new families into our congregation in three months" or "we want to train ten new evangelists to spread God's Word by the end of the year.").
3. **Resources.** We then move to the left side of the page, where it lists what kind of resources we need to accomplish this goal. Again, be as specific as you can. ("We need 20 tables and 100 chairs." "We need 25 bibles." "We need four teachers." "We need to have relationships with these people.") Then, check off the resources that you have, so you know what you need to get.
4. **Readiness.** After looking this list over, ask yourselves, "Do we have what we need?" If you have everything you need to do this project, then you can get right to work. If you do not have everything you need, but you know where and how to get it, then you can add that to the list of tasks in the next section. If what you need is too large, you may need to develop a separate plan just to obtain it. (For example, if you need good relationships with certain people but you don't even know them, you may need to develop a strategy for identifying them and getting to know them.)
5. **Tasks.** Once you are ready to move ahead, you can start to assign tasks to move the plan forward. Again, be as specific and clear as possible. List what will be done, who will do it, and when they will do it. ("Joseph will bring 10 tables to the church by Sunday." "Maria will call five families by two weeks from today."). As you write down the various tasks, be sure to keep looking back at the goal and objective. Ask "If we do all these tasks, will

Leading in Congregation and Community

we meet our goal? Will we fulfill our objective?” Also, look at the core values that you have defined. Is what we are doing and how we are doing it consistent with our values?

6. **Evaluation.** Once the plan is accomplished, take some time to evaluate the work. Did we meet our goal? Were we successful? If not, don't get discouraged or try to lay blame. Instead, see it as an opportunity to learn. Where did things break down? Did we not find all the resources we needed? Did we have the wrong list of tasks? Did people not do what they said they would do? Why not? You could learn that your goals were unrealistic, that the tasks were too difficult, that communication didn't happen well, or that you made some assumptions that didn't prove to be true. If things went well, you can also take stock of what you have learned. Then, take time to thank everyone—especially God—and celebrate!

If we have time, we will now break into groups by community, and we will work together to choose a project or goal and fill out the planning guide. We will take around 30 minutes to develop the plan, and then we will take five minutes for each team to present their work to the entire group.

Ninth Hour: Stewardship: Using our Resources to Engage in God’s Mission

Let’s take a few moments to take a look at the skills and attitudes that we have explored in this course.

We have looked at our own leadership styles and how we can use different styles based on our gifts and the situation around us.
We have examined how power is used in communities and can be a way to build up leaders and accomplish goals
We have explored the roots of conflict and practiced ways of responding that build up instead of tear down
We have evaluated how we make decisions as a community and used a planning guide to organize and evaluate our common work

- *Are there other things that you have learned?*
- *Are there other things you would still like to explore? List them here:*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

We are now going to take a look at how we can use our resources as a community to do what God is calling us to do.

- *When we speak of resources, what do you think of?*

What may first come to mind is money, but it’s more helpful to think more broadly about resources, including our time, our talents and skills, and our physical resources, like money, buildings, cars, etc.

- *What comes to mind when you hear words like poverty, wealth, riches, sharing, and need?*
- *What are some of the lessons you were taught in your culture or by your parents about money?*
- *What questions do you have about how money is used in this culture?*

Leading in Congregation and Community

The skills and attitudes that we have been developing in this course can all be applied to how we use our resources to engage in God's mission. Leading, listening, planning, managing conflict, all are skills we need to use whenever we want to organize and make use of our resources.

Let's read Exodus 16: 1-35, one of the earliest stories in the bible about how God wants us to use our resources.

- *Where did the manna come from?*
- *What happened when people didn't follow the instructions and tried to hoard it?*
- *What happened on the sixth day?*

Dan Erlander, Lutheran pastor and author, shares that there are five basic lessons we can learn from this story:

Lessons of the Manna

1. We own nothing. All is God's. All is gift
2. God gives enough for all to be shared by all.
3. Hoarding causes rot. It stinks.
4. Work is helping God distribute manna, the gift God promises to all.
5. God gives rest so humans can practice full time what life is all about: friendship with God, friendship with others, and friendship with nature.

Let's break into groups of 3-4 people and discuss these questions. After 15 minutes or so, we'll hear some comments from each group.

- *How does this story and these five lessons connect with life in your congregation and community?*
- *What are the biggest challenges your community faces about money and resources?*
- *What happens when people use money and resources as a tool for gaining more power and climbing the pyramid, instead of using it as a tool for building up the community?*
- *How does your congregation plan ahead, making sure it saves its resources (manna) for the days when it is needed?*

Final Takeaway

As we conclude this class, think back to the various topics we covered, including leadership styles, the proper use of power, conflict resolution, planning for mission, and using our resources. List three things that you have already done or will do as a result of what you have learned in this class, along with dates by which you will do them.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

