

Article Review

**“Ministers and Church Conflict Management in Pastoral Ministry”  
by Pastor Oladele Olabode**

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**What is one concept that stood out to you in this article?**

One concept that stood out to me is the presence and importance of relational leadership in any conflicts presented to the church. The idea that “effective leadership” means a leader must be a servant first (Olabode, p. 76, 2019) runs contrary to the current church model (eg. where being a leader means exhibiting the negative attributes found in 2 Timothy 3:2-4 and being served by others.)

I appreciated the idea that the central goal of relational leadership is the well-being of people within a group (Olabode, p. 76, 2019.) In today’s church, it is rare to find a relational leader who is purposeful, inclusive, empowers his/her flock while personifying ethical and moral values established by Christ (Olabode, p. 76-77, 2019.) For Olabode, the relational leader must be adept, not only in the details of “conflict care” (eg., the presence of different relational leadership strategies/conflict management styles) but, “the needs of the soul” as well (Olabode, p. 78, 2019)

It was refreshing to see a church pastor acknowledge the presence of conflict within the Church and even identify it as “normal” (Olabode, p. 78, 2019.) Yet, despite this, he recognized the Church could be united only with the courage “and proper handling of conflict by church leaders.” (Olabode, p. 78, 2019.) Olabode believes this unity would enable the church to grow spiritually and numerically. (Olabode, p. 72, 2019.) While correct on the latter, I believe the spiritual component is more critical and has a greater impact on the world (3 John 1:2.)

I felt the article lacked a personal component. I would have liked more examples of how each of the overall relational strategies was used by the author in an actual church context. The article seemed to be more of a detailed academic presentation without grounding it in the day to

day church setting (eg. certain types of conflict and how they were successfully addressed personally in the church, amongst individuals, etc...)

### **What implications does this concept have for leading in the church?**

The implication relational leadership has for leading in the church means leaders would need to know, embrace and utilize multiple relational concepts within their congregation. This allows the leadership to navigate conflict in a holistic and inclusive way (not cookie cutter or one size fits all model.)

This requires humility (especially when you do not have all the answers as a leader) plus an application of a servant's lifestyle in how they relate to the church (Matthew 20:27; Galatians 5:13.) Also, hearing and seeing the congregations' perspective instead of resorting to a "touch not mine anointed" (Psalm 105:15) stance when confronted with some truths or falsehoods is critical. With that posture, the leader can see beyond what is presented to them in the midst of conflict. In doing so, leaders can avoid becoming "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" [1 Corinthians 13:1] and/or acting pharisaical (Matthew 23:27.)

This is effective because it avoids a path where conflict would destroy/split a church or individuals. If done properly, it means equipping and empowering those within and outside their Church and have them truly "taste and see that the Lord is good." If not, leaders would be so spiritually set in their ways that "numerical and spiritual growth" is impossible. We are called to produce new fruit for the Lord and that cannot be accomplished without addressing any relational issues on a continual basis. If we continue to do the same thing year after year as Christian leaders, we are not personally effective or growing in the faith.

**What needs to change in your life as a result?**

The one thing in my life that needs to change as a result is knowing and applying the varying relational styles. With that knowledge, I can embody Christ's call for us in Luke 6:31 to likewise do unto others and see what is truly driving another person to take a passionate position in the midst of the conflict.

I am learning to view conflict as something that cannot be avoided (even in a church context) but, can be healthy and necessary if utilized properly. I see that I have to change and switch from an avoidance stance, be more assertive in the midst of conflict and see conflict within the Christian perspective as healthy, if done properly.

Also, if the conflict is deeply rooted, I have to change to being open and receptive to the presence/guidance of an uninterested professional mediator, which may be required. 3 John 1:2 mentions "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." I see the Lord commanding me to grow and He occasionally uses conflict and trials to get us to the next place of soul/spiritual growth in Him.

**References:**

Olabode, O. (2019, May). *Ministers and Church Conflict Management in Pastoral Ministry*. BTSK Insight, 16(1), 72–86.