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# GROWTH POINTS

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## Handling Conflict

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Every growing church is a high-energy environment. People sacrifice time, money, and comfort. They carry strong opinions. They feel deep ownership. Vision runs high. Structure runs thin. That combination guarantees tension.

The question is not whether conflict will come. The question is how you will lead when it does. Conflict is not a sign that your church is failing. It is a sign that it is alive.

Here are seven leadership principles drawn from church growth research.

### 1. Expect Conflict.

Growing churches are emotionally intense, relationally close, resource-constrained, and structurally fluid. That environment naturally produces friction.

Wise leaders normalize conflict before it arrives. They teach biblical reconciliation in the first year. They establish clear relational expectations. They say publicly:

“We expect disagreement. We protect unity.”

When conflict is framed as normal rather than catastrophic, people respond more calmly when it occurs.

### 2. Clarify Governance.

Church growth leaders stress the importance of defining decision-making authority early. Answer these questions in writing:

- Who makes final decisions
- What decisions require consensus?
- What role does the core team play?
- Is the planter a visionary leader, a team facilitator, or both?

Many early church conflicts are not theological but structural. People argue because expectations were never clarified. Clarity prevents unnecessary friction.

### 3. Address Conflict.

Unresolved conflict spreads quickly. Left unattended, it drains momentum, discourages volunteers, and damages credibility with newcomers. Adopt a simple leadership rule:

1. Go private first.
2. Keep the circle small.
3. Focus on issues, not personalities.
4. Resolve before Sunday if possible.

Public conflict in a fragile congregation is costly. Handle it early, quietly, and directly.

#### 4. Recognize Healthy Conflict.

Not all conflict is destructive. Healthy conflict sharpens strategy, improves systems, clarifies theology, and strengthens commitment. It centers on ideas.

Unhealthy conflict attacks people. It forms coalitions. It fuels private conversations. It becomes emotional and personal.

Ask yourself if this is mission tension or ego tension? Mission tension refines the church. Ego tension fractures it. Leadership maturity shows up in your ability to distinguish the two.

#### 5. Protect the Team.

Research shows that core-team fractures are the number one destabilizer in growing churches.

The core team carries the culture. If trust erodes at that level, the entire church feels it.

Protect your team by (1) Holding regular relational check-ins; (2) Clarifying expectations for commitment; (3) Using written covenants, and (4) Addressing divisive behavior sooner than later.

When a core team member becomes negative or resistant to mission, loving confrontation is required. Avoiding hard conversations to preserve short-term peace creates long-term division.

#### 6. Re-Center the Vision.

Conflict in growing churches disguises itself as (1) Music style debates; (2) Budget disagreements; (3) Ministry turf issues, and (4) Personal preferences. But beneath most tension is vision drift.

High-capacity church leaders restate vision under pressure. When vision clarity declines, conflict increases. Strong pastors return the conversation to first principles:

- Why do we exist?
- Who are we trying to reach?
- What will we prioritize?
- What will we not do?

Vision clarity diffuses many surface disagreements.

#### 7. Guard Your Soul.

Conflict hits the pastor hardest. It brings emotional fatigue, self-doubt, isolation, and family strain. A discouraged leader escalates conflict rather than resolving it.

Healthy pastors build protective rhythms including outside mentors, peer networks, honest accountability, and sabbath rest. A healthy pastor brings calm into tense situations. A depleted pastor magnifies anxiety.

Remember: Handled wisely, conflict does not weaken a new church. It strengthens it.

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