

Navigating Congregational Disputes

This course applies a transformational systems approach to the emotional life and health of congregations and their leaders. Systems theory views human behavior within congregations and families as living systems that are symbiotically connected to form a single emotional unit. What disrupts one faction or member can end up impacting the whole social system. When discord and anxiety strike, the whole system can disintegrate into chaos and conflict.

Students will learn to utilize systems thinking when assessing conflicts and managing themselves and their emotional reactivity during the processes of mediation. Studying habitual patterns of reactivity that have been passed down through generations of congregations and their families draws attention to how interactions and reactions are mutually influenced and how they become repeated and turn into patterns. This happens on an unconscious level and becomes part of a congregation's history. Looking at conflict through a systems lens creates an objective viewpoint in which to respond to conflict in healthier and more respectful ways. Students will also learn to identify the disparate elements of conflict that lead to congregational disharmony and the steps necessary to assess the emotional health of a congregation and what can be done to create a healthier church and family.

This course will serve as a reflective resource in your life and faith as we explore systems theory as a tool for preventing and responding to conflict. Skills learned in this course will be useful for application to any type of organization, and is not limited solely to congregations.