

Conflict and Resolution in Church Settings: Definitions, Inevitability and Significance

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Abstract:

This study delves into conflict and its resolution within church settings, focusing on definitions, inevitability, and significance. Employing a mixed-method approach, it blends literature review with empirical analysis, utilizing structured questionnaires administered to members of Foursquare Gospel Churches in Lagos, Nigeria. Through purposive sampling, 120 respondents directly impacted by such conflicts were targeted across three churches. Anchored on Social Identity Theory, data collection encompasses demographic details and perceptions of conflict and its resolution. Statistical analysis, including SPSS, interprets the findings, highlighting conflicts' inevitability and advocating proactive resolution for spiritual and organizational growth. The study's findings reveal that a significant portion of respondents (53.26%) acknowledge the inevitability of conflict within the Church, emphasizing that a conflict-free environment is unrealistic. Most participants (81.52%) agree that conflict is essential and inevitable in human relationships, and 51.09% recognize that the Church cannot fulfill its reconciliatory mission if it aims to eliminate all conflict. Even the most vibrant and scripturally aligned churches experience conflict (78.26%), and this does not necessarily indicate flawed leadership or spiritual deficiency (83.70%). Various conflict dimensions are explored, recognizing its pervasive nature and diverse manifestations. Insights from biblical narratives and contemporary church experiences underscore the complexity and relevance of conflict. Strategies for resolution, emphasizing timely intervention and constructive dialogue, are outlined.

Keywords: Conflict-Resolution, Church-Settings, Definitions and inevitability

Introduction

Conflict is a natural part of human relationships, including those within churches. It happens when people have different opinions, beliefs, or interests, leading to disagreements. If not handled properly, conflict can create divisions and weaken a church's unity. However, when managed well, it can lead to positive change and spiritual growth. This study explores the meaning of conflict and conflict resolution, why disagreements are unavoidable in churches, and how they affect church life. Conflict is generally defined as a situation where individuals or

groups perceive that their goals or values are incompatible, leading to tension or opposition (Rahim, 2011: 15). In churches, conflicts often arise due to differences in doctrine, personality clashes, or competing visions for church activities (Leas, 2001:23). Understanding the root causes of these conflicts is important for resolving them effectively.

Some people hold the view that conflict can be completely avoided in churches if all members strictly adhere to Christian teachings. However, practical experience and organizational studies indicate that disagreements are an inevitable aspect of any group setting. Recognizing this reality allows church leaders and members to approach conflicts constructively, focusing on understanding, dialogue, and reconciliation rather than assuming they can be entirely prevented. Churches consist of people from diverse backgrounds with different perspectives and expectations, making misunderstandings unavoidable. If left unaddressed, conflicts can escalate, causing division and disrupting the church's mission.

Conflict resolution is the process of addressing and managing disagreements in a way that promotes peace and unity. It involves finding solutions that allow all parties to feel heard and respected (Fisher & Ury, 1991:41). Resolving conflicts effectively not only solves immediate problems but also strengthens relationships within the church community. Church leaders have a major role in handling conflicts wisely. They should address disputes before they grow into bigger problems, encourage open communication, and ensure that biblical values guide conflict resolution. Unresolved conflicts can significantly damage relationships within the church, undermining trust, unity, and the overall health of the congregation. This study provides a detailed understanding of how conflicts can be managed to support the church's mission and values.

Church conflicts can weaken unity and affect the spiritual well-being of members. While churches aim to create a loving and peaceful environment, conflicts still occur due to doctrinal disagreements, personality differences, and disputes over church activities. If these issues are not handled properly, they can cause division and discourage members from participating actively in church life. A major challenge is the lack of knowledge about conflict resolution. Many church leaders and members do not know how to identify the real causes of conflicts or how to handle them in a way that aligns with Christian values. Without proper training, conflicts remain unresolved or are poorly managed, leading to long-term problems within the congregation.

Another issue is the unrealistic expectation that conflicts should not happen in a Christian community. When disagreements arise, some people feel disappointed or frustrated, making the situation worse instead of addressing it constructively. As a result, conflicts are often ignored or dealt with in ways that do not resolve the underlying issues. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of conflict and conflict resolution within churches. It highlights that disagreements are a natural part of relationships and offers practical solutions for resolving them effectively. The goal is to help church leaders and members develop the skills necessary to handle conflicts positively, leading to stronger, more united, and spiritually healthy church communities.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory: Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, explains how people gain a sense of identity from the social groups they belong to. In a church setting, this means that members often find their identity and belonging through shared religious

beliefs, values, and practices. However, differences in group identities, such as varying doctrinal interpretations, worship styles, or leadership preferences, can lead to conflicts within the community.

This theory is useful in understanding why such conflicts occur in churches. It shows how social identities influence how people behave and perceive one another. For example, disagreements may arise when individuals strongly identify with a specific group or perspective, leading to misunderstandings or tensions. Recognizing these dynamics can help church leaders identify the root causes of conflicts and address them more effectively.

Social Identity Theory also offers practical strategies for resolving conflicts in church communities. By focusing on shared values and common goals, church leaders can promote unity and reduce divisions. Encouraging the use of inclusive language and creating opportunities for positive interactions among different groups can help to ease tensions and foster reconciliation. This approach provides valuable insights for building harmony and understanding within church settings.

Review of Literature

Conflict in the Church: Causes and Resolution

Conflicts are a natural part of life, occurring when people or groups feel that their needs, values, or goals clash with those of others. These disagreements happen in personal relationships, workplaces, communities, and even in the Church. While conflicts in the Church are unavoidable, they must be properly managed to maintain unity and growth. According to Leas (2001: 17), conflict should not always be seen as negative because it can lead to deeper understanding and spiritual maturity. Sande (2004: 29) also stresses that handling conflicts biblically strengthens relationships and fosters spiritual growth within the congregation.

Conflicts arise from deep human needs such as identity, security, and recognition. Jeong (2008) notes that, many conflicts originate from fundamental human needs. Misunderstandings and miscommunication frequently contribute significantly to the development and escalation of conflicts. The Bible provides examples of conflict in the Church, such as the disagreements in Acts 15 and Paul's confrontation with Peter in Galatians 2:11-14. These biblical events highlight the importance of addressing conflicts rather than ignoring them.

Resolving conflicts within the Church is essential to fulfilling its mission of reconciliation. Lederach (2003: 81) emphasizes that peacebuilding in Christian communities requires humility, dialogue, and a commitment to reconciliation. Volf (2006) emphasizes that churches have a responsibility to actively restore fractured relationships, noting that unaddressed conflicts can undermine congregational unity and divert the Church from its mission.

Conflicts may arise in multiple forms, ranging from individual disagreements to broader organizational tensions, and recognizing these variations is crucial for effective management (Lencioni, 2005, p.48) highlights that, personal conflicts often arise due to differences in personality and values. Conflicts in groups can come from disagreements over roles, responsibilities, or limited resources. Additionally, conflicts at a larger scale, such as between different Christian denominations, can be caused by doctrinal differences or competition for influence (Wilmot & Hocker, 2018: 116).

Defining and Understanding Conflict in Church Environments

Conflict in church environments is a multifaceted phenomenon that reflects the diversity and complexity of human interactions. Conflict arises when individuals or groups within a church have differing goals, beliefs, or values, leading to disagreements or tension. It is a natural part of any community and can either strengthen or weaken relationships, depending on how it is addressed.

Osborne (2016) argues that conflict within church settings is inevitable due to the diverse backgrounds, expectations, and personalities of congregants. He emphasizes that disagreements are not inherently destructive; instead, they can be managed constructively when church leaders approach them with humility, care, and intentional strategies to maintain relational health and organizational stability. Conversely, Tucker and Mitchell (2021) focus on doctrinal differences as a primary source of church conflict, suggesting that theological clarity and education are key to minimizing disputes. This perspective partly diverges from Afolabi (2021), who argues that overlooked leadership dynamics and internal power struggles are significant drivers of church conflict, and advocates for transparent leadership structures to mitigate tensions.

Similarly, Green (2023) highlights cultural diversity as a unique aspect of church conflict, especially in multicultural congregations. He contends that cultural sensitivity and inclusivity are essential in understanding and addressing disagreements within diverse church settings. These authors collectively acknowledge the inevitability of conflict while offering varying perspectives on its root causes. However, a critical gap remains in their discussions: the transformative potential of conflict in fostering reconciliation and spiritual growth. While many view conflict resolution as an end goal, this study proposes that conflicts, when managed biblically and constructively, can serve as catalysts for deeper unity and organizational renewal.

Addressing this gap, the study provides a framework for understanding conflict within church environments not merely as a challenge but as an opportunity for growth. By integrating practical conflict resolution strategies and theological insights, the study aims to equip church leaders and members to handle disputes in ways that strengthen their communities and advance their mission. This comprehensive approach bridges existing theoretical and practical gaps, enriching the discourse on conflict in religious settings.

The Inevitability of Conflict in Church Settings

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human relationships, including within church settings, due to the diverse nature of human interactions and priorities. Social, cultural, and doctrinal differences often create misunderstandings, which can manifest as conflict within congregations. Biblical examples underscore the inevitability of conflict in Christian communities. Trevin Wax notes the disputes between early church leaders, such as Paul and Barnabas, illustrating how interpersonal differences have always existed among believers (Wax, 2024). Similarly, James Emery White identifies unmet expectations and leadership dynamics as common sources of conflict in modern churches. He emphasizes the importance of proactive leadership to address these challenges (White, 2022).

Organisational and theological differences make conflict inevitable within large church networks. Birdsall's doctoral study of the Lausanne Movement shows that doctrinal disagreements and competing operational priorities frequently generate tension across such

global alliances, and he argues that clear, intentional communication is essential for managing those tensions and sustaining productive collaboration (Birdsall, 2013). Leslie Holmes offers a constructive perspective, framing conflict as an opportunity for growth. He advocates a transformative approach where churches use disputes to foster humility, reconciliation, and spiritual maturity (Holmes, 2023).

Despite these insights, existing literature often generalizes conflict resolution strategies without accounting for cultural nuances. This leaves a gap in understanding how localized, context-specific approaches can address conflicts effectively in multicultural or doctrinally diverse church environments. Further research is needed to explore culturally sensitive frameworks tailored to specific congregational dynamics.

Review on the effect of an Inappropriate Management of Conflicts

Conflict, when managed appropriately, can foster growth and reconciliation within church communities by promoting understanding, encouraging dialogue, and deepening relationships. Various authors explore this dynamic, highlighting both positive and negative aspects of conflict in church settings. Grosch & Wood (2020) emphasize that conflict can create opportunities for reflection and self-awareness, leading to personal and communal growth. In church communities, addressing conflicts openly allows individuals to engage with differing perspectives, which can strengthen relationships and foster a culture of reconciliation.

Smith (2018) suggests that conflict resolution, when approached biblically, can enhance unity and provide a platform for healing. Churches that manage conflicts effectively are often more resilient, as they develop stronger ties among members and a greater commitment to peace and cooperation. Wilson & McNair (2021) argue that conflict is a natural part of church life, and when embraced constructively, it can deepen spiritual maturity. They highlight that conflicts around theology, leadership, or values can prompt reflection on faith, helping the community to grow stronger and more cohesive.

Johnson (2019) asserts that conflict can provide opportunities for the church to live out its teachings of forgiveness and reconciliation. When members navigate conflicts together, they learn the importance of humility, empathy, and mutual respect, which can strengthen the body of the church. Although conflict can stimulate growth and renewal, Evans (2022) cautions that when left unresolved, it often breeds division, resentment, and spiritual stagnation. He observes that many church communities struggle to manage internal disputes constructively, resulting in unhealthy environments that obstruct both reconciliation and collective flourishing.

Conflict in Church Communities: A Pathway to Growth and Reconciliation

Conflict in church communities is often seen as disruptive, but it can also offer opportunities for growth and reconciliation when handled properly. Here's how conflict can lead to positive outcomes:

According to *Nelson (2020)*, conflict can act as a trigger for positive change within church communities. When conflicts arise, they highlight unresolved issues, offering church leaders and members the chance to address these problems. This process can lead to better communication, improved emotional intelligence, and stronger bonds within the congregation. Nelson emphasizes that conflict encourages churches to reassess their values, fostering spiritual growth

and unity. On the other hand, *Smith (2022)* argues that conflict can often lead to division rather than reconciliation. He points out that unresolved conflict can cause long-term harm, creating distrust and damaging relationships. Smith stresses the importance of implementing proactive conflict management strategies to prevent church communities from falling apart due to unresolved disputes.

Supporting Nelson's view, *Williams (2023)* argues that conflict, when addressed in a constructive manner, provides an opportunity for both personal and collective growth. Williams suggests that conflict can teach the values of forgiveness, patience, and understanding. This process can lead to spiritual renewal and a more unified community when church leaders and members engage in meaningful reconciliation. However, *Thomas (2021)* warns that conflict can sometimes become toxic, especially in situations where church leaders lack effective mediation skills. Thomas suggests that, without proper conflict resolution skills, conflicts can escalate and harm the community. He advocates for preventive measures, such as training church leaders in conflict resolution, to minimize these risks. While these authors agree that conflict has the potential to foster growth and reconciliation, they do not provide enough practical, tailored strategies for conflict resolution in different types of church settings. Future research should explore specific, actionable strategies that cater to the unique dynamics of various church environments, whether large or small congregations.

Growth and Reconciliation Through Conflict in Church Communities

Conflict within church communities is often viewed solely as a negative disruption, yet recent research highlights its potential to become an avenue for growth and reconciliation when managed thoughtfully. In fact, conflict can serve as a catalyst for deeper relational health, structural reform, and theological reflection.

First, conflict brings to the surface underlying tensions whether doctrinal disagreements, cultural dissonances, leadership crises, or interpersonal hurt that otherwise remain hidden. For example, a study in Zimbabwe found that when church leadership conflict was examined honestly, it exposed issues of accountability and encouraged introspection that eventually led to constructive change. Because hidden problems cannot be resolved, bringing them into the open allows communities to address root causes rather than merely suppressing symptoms.

Second, when conflict is navigated with frameworks of reconciliation and restoration, it fosters relational maturity among congregants and leaders alike. Research from Kenya on religious women's reconciliation processes shows how moving from brokenness to social cohesion involved intentional steps of reparation, relationship-building, and collective trust-renewal. Such engagement cultivates qualities like empathy, humility, and mutual responsibility attributes that strengthen the body of Christ and align with the church's mission of reconciliation.

Third, conflict offers an opportunity for the church to reform its structures and practices. In Ghana, studies show that churches which integrated culturally sensitive conflict-resolution strategies and leadership training improved unity, inclusivity, and retention of membership. In effect, conflict becomes a prompt for organisational renewal: it shakes complacency and invites the church to align its structures more closely with its values.

Fourth, theologically, conflict can deepen a congregation's engagement with themes of forgiveness, restoration, and communal reconciliation. As Oppenshaw, Nel, and Louw (2018)

argue, congregational conflict invites the body to reflect on what it means to live out reconciliation as followers of Christ. By integrating biblical concepts of repentance, restoration, and peace-making, the church can transform conflict from a destructive force into a means of spiritual formation.

Finally, managed well, conflict strengthens the church's witness to the broader society. When church communities' model transparent, grace-filled responses to conflict acknowledging harm, facilitating repair, restoring relationships they amplify their credibility as agents of peace. The "just peace-diaconia" framework in Canada highlights how faith communities can serve as bridges of reconciliation beyond their own walls. In sum, while conflict in church settings presents risks, it also offers opportunities. When hidden tensions are surfaced, relational maturity is cultivated, structural reforms are enacted, theological reflection deepened, and communal credibility enhanced, the church moves toward both growth and reconciliation. The key lies in recognising conflict not simply as something to be avoided, but as something to be engaged under the guidance of wisdom, grace, and a commitment to reconciliation.

Methods

This research investigates the efficacy of timely conflict resolution as a tool for fostering church growth, focusing on the case study of Foursquare Gospel Church in Mangoro, Ikeja, Lagos State, Nigeria. Employing a descriptive survey method, the study aims to understand the impacts of timely conflict resolution on church growth within the context of congregational conflicts experienced by select churches in the Mangoro area. A structured questionnaire was administered to members and worshippers of three Foursquare Gospel Churches in Mangoro, Onilekere, and Iloro, which have previously encountered congregational conflicts.

The research employed purposive sampling to target individuals directly affected by such conflicts, totaling 120 respondents across the three churches. The questionnaire, consisting of 32 items across five sections, explored respondents' demographics, understanding of conflict inevitability, perceptions of church growth, negative impacts of delayed conflict resolution, and positive impacts of timely conflict resolution. To ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability, a pilot study was conducted with pastors and leaders, resulting in necessary corrections and adjustments. Subsequently, the corrected questionnaires were administered to the targeted respondents with the assistance of a research assistant.

Data collected from the questionnaires underwent quantitative analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis involved simple frequency counts and percentages to interpret respondents' perspectives on various research questions. Demographic data were also analyzed based on simple percentages. Overall, the study seeks to provide insights into the role of timely conflict resolution in promoting church growth and fostering unity within congregations. By examining the perceptions and experiences of individuals directly affected by conflicts, the research aims to inform strategies for effective conflict management and reconciliation within church communities.

Section A-The Demographic Data of the Respondents

TABLE 1: Gender of the Respondents

SEX	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGES (%)
MALE	47	51.09%
FEMALE	45	48.91%
TOTAL	92	100%

Source: Field work

TABLE 2: AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

AGE (YEARS)	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGES (%)
UNDER 20 YRS	5	5.43%
20-30 YRS	27	29.34%
31-40 YRS	21	22.83%
41-50 YRS	17	18.48%
ABOVE 50 YRS	22	23.91%
TOTAL	92	100%

Source: Field work

The respondents represented a wide range of age groups. Those under age 20 years formed 5.43%, 20-30 years old made up 29.34%, 31-40 years old formed 22.83%, 41-50 years old represented 18.48%, while those above 50 years old made up 23.91% of the respondents. This indicates the inclusion of both the young and the old, which may further enhance a balanced perspective of the study.

Table 3: Time Duration in Church by the Respondents

TIME (YEARS)	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGES (%)
BELOW 2YRS	10	10.87%
5YRS	16	17.39%
BELOW 10YRS	15	16.31%
ABOVE 10YRS	51	55.43%
TOTAL	92	100%

Source: Field work

Duration in Church: This presents the time duration in church of the respondents. Those who have been in their local churches for below 2years made up 10.87%, those up to 5 years in church formed 17.39%, those below 10 years represented 16.31%, while those above 10 years in church represented 55.43% of the respondents. The implication of this feedback is that irrespective of how short or long people have been in church, one form of conflict or the other had been inevitably witnessed.

Table 4: Status of Respondents in the Church

STATUS	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGES (%)
MEMBERS	9	9.78%
WORSHIPERS	13	14.13%
WORKER	50	54.35%
MINISTER AND LEADERS	20	21.74%
TOTAL	92	100%

Source: Field work

Respondents' Status in Church: The four (4) categories identified within the respondents are the Members, who made up 9.78%, Worshippers, representing 14.13%, Workers, making up 54.35%, as well as Ministers & Leaders, representing 21.74% of the respondents. The greatest percentage of the respondents being workers indicates a very comfortable level of the study's objectivity.

Research Question 1: What Is Conflict?

The survey findings reveal strong consensus among respondents regarding the definition and inevitability of conflict. Conflict is widely understood as a fight, struggle, or clash between individuals or groups (91.31%), stemming from differences in interests, beliefs, and perceptions (93.48%). It is also recognized as a relationship marked by incompatible goals (76.09%) and resistance to religious claims or practices (70.65%). Furthermore, conflict is acknowledged as disagreements over valued matters, particularly when values contradict (94.56%).

Here's a revised version incorporating recent sources in simple language:

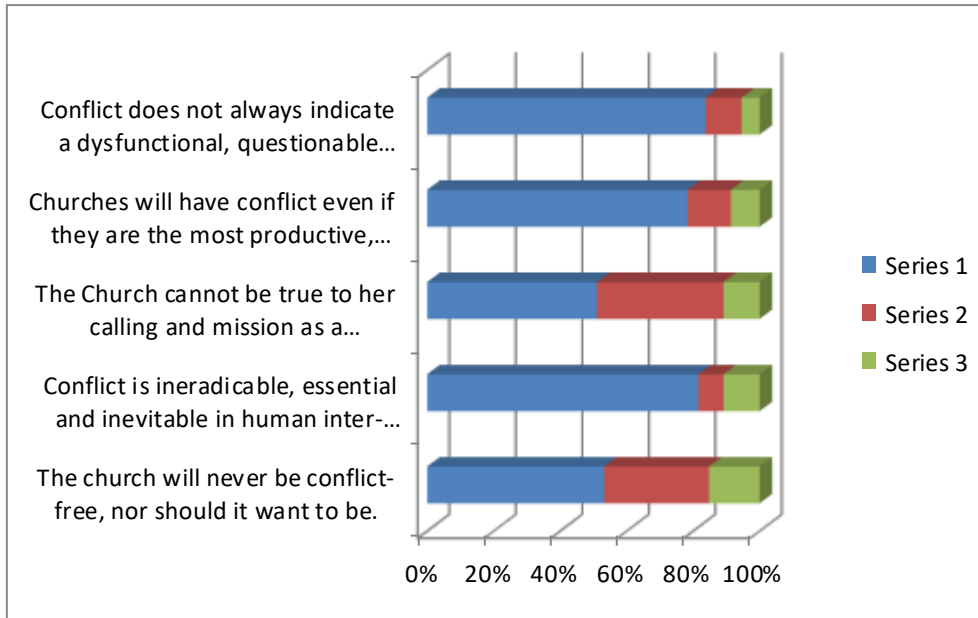
Conflict happens when people disagree because they have different ideas, beliefs, or goals. According to Mund and Johnson (2021), conflicts in relationships can make people feel lonely and emotionally unsettled. They explain that when individuals feel that their goals or values do not align with others, frustration and misunderstanding can arise. Similarly, Putnam (2006) describes conflict as a natural part of human interaction, emphasizing that it often stems from communication differences and opposing viewpoints. Johnson and Johnson (1996) add that conflicts are common in schools and workplaces, where people struggle with clashing perspectives, leading to tension or disagreements. These studies show that conflict is not just about fighting; it is often about misunderstanding and the challenge of balancing different perspectives in everyday life.

Regarding conflict inevitability, a majority of respondents affirm that the Church will never be entirely free from conflict (53.26%). A recent study by Labuschagne et al. (2023) underscores the inevitability of conflict within church congregations. The research reveals that 78% of respondents identify power struggles among congregants as a primary source of conflict, with 71% noting that competition for leadership positions often leads to disputes. Additionally, 92% report conflicts related to the church's mission, and 65% cite theological disagreements as common issues. These findings highlight that conflict is a prevalent and natural aspect of congregational life, often arising from interpersonal dynamics and differing perspectives on leadership and church direction. and that conflict is intrinsic to human interpersonal relations (81.52%). Additionally, respondents agree that the Church cannot fulfill its reconciliatory mission while striving to be entirely conflict-free (51.09%). They also acknowledge that even

productive, Spirit-filled churches experience conflict (78.26%) and that conflict does not always signify flawed leadership or spiritual deficiency (83.70%).

These findings underscore the widespread recognition of conflict as an inherent aspect of human relationships.

Figure showing the Inevitability of Conflict in Human’s Inter-Personal Relationships:



**SECTION B:
 ISSUES ON
 CONFLICT
 AND ITS
 INEVITABI
 LITY IN
 HUMAN
 INTER-
 PERSONAL
 RELATIONS
 HIPS.**

Please, tick the option that best describes your response to the following statements.
 Key: YES (Y)

NO (N) NOT SURE (NS)

S/N	STATEMENTS	YES	NO	NOT SURE
1	Conflict arises inevitably from differences in interests, ideas, orientations, beliefs, and perceptions.	86 (93.48%)	6 (6.52%)	NIL (0%)
2	Conflict means a struggle, clash, or quarrel between individuals or groups.	84 (91.31%)	6 (6.52%)	2 (2.17%)
3	Conflict is a relationship between two or more parties having incompatible goals.	70 (76.09%)	12 (13.04%)	10 (10.87%)
4	Religious conflict means resisting or opposing others' religious claims or practices.	65 (70.65%)	13 (14.13%)	14 (15.22%)
5	Conflict occurs when parties disagree over valued matters with opposing interests.	87 (94.56%)	1 (1.09%)	4 (4.35%)
SN	CONFLICTS INEVITABILITY IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS	YES	NO	NOT SURE
6	The church will never be conflict-free, nor should it want to be.	49 (53.26%)	29 (31.52%)	14 (15.22%)

7	Conflict is ineradicable, essential and inevitable in human inter-personal relations.	75 (81.52%)	7 (7.61%)	10 (10.87%)
8	The Church cannot fulfill its mission if it aims to be conflict-free.	47 (51.09%)	35 (38.04%)	10 (10.87%)
9	Even the most productive, Spirit-filled, biblical churches will experience conflict.	72 (78.26%)	12 (13.04%)	8 (8.70%)
10	Conflict does not always indicate a dysfunctional, questionable leadership or spiritual carnality.	77 (83.70%)	10 (10.87%)	5 (5.43%)

Source: Field work

As presented in Table in Section B: reveals the various responses of the correspondents to Issues on Conflict and its inevitability in Human Inter-personal relationships. Respondents were given three (3) options (Yes, No, Not Sure) from which to choose only one for each suggested assertion.

As per the assertion that there will always be conflict due to individual differences in interests, ideas, orientations, beliefs, perceptions and tendencies, 93.48% of respondents answered 'Yes' while the remaining 6.52% answered 'No'.

Concerning the statement that Conflict means a fight, struggle or battle, clash, controversy or quarrel between and among individuals or groups, 91.31% of respondents answered 'Yes', 6.52% responded 'No' while the remaining 2.17% answered 'Not Sure'.

On the assertion that Conflict is a relationship between two or more parties having incompatible goals, 76.09% of respondents said 'Yes', 13.04% said 'No', while the remaining 10.87% answered 'Not Sure'.

On the claim that Conflict in Religion means an attempt at resisting the religious claims or practices of others, 70.65% of respondents said 'Yes', 14.13% said 'No', while the remaining 15.22% answered 'Not Sure'.

To round off the aspect of investigating respondents' understanding of Conflict, it was further posited that Conflict is a relationship between parties who disagree over matters they value, especially when a party's value contradicts that of the other. To this position, 94.56% of respondents answered 'Yes', 1.09% said 'No', while the remaining 4.35% answered "Not Sure". The above responses showed that the greatest percentage of our respondents have a good understanding, as well as, agreed on what conflict means.

Research Question 2: Can Conflict be entirely avoided in Church Interpersonal Relationships?

The research findings reveal that a significant portion of respondents acknowledges the inevitability of conflict within the Church (53.26%), emphasizing that it should not strive for a conflict-free state. Conflict is deemed essential, inevitable, and integral to human interpersonal relations (81.52%). Furthermore, it is recognized that the Church cannot fulfill its reconciliatory mission if it aims to be entirely free of conflict (51.09%). Even the most vibrant and scripturally aligned churches experience conflict (78.26%) which does not necessarily signify flawed leadership or spiritual deficiency (83.70%).

A recent study titled "Navigating Workplace Conflicts and Fostering Innovative Behaviors" by Zhang and Huo (2024) explores how conflicts in the workplace can lead to positive outcomes, such as increased innovation. The researchers found that when conflicts are managed constructively, they can challenge existing assumptions and stimulate creative thinking among team members. This process often results in the development of novel solutions and improvements within organizations. The study emphasizes the importance of effective conflict management strategies and supportive leadership in transforming potential disputes into opportunities for innovation.

These findings align with Schellenberg's (1996) assertion that conflict plays a pivotal role in society by fostering social change and stimulating innovation. Similarly, Bercovitch (1984) notes that conflicts often arise from interpersonal interactions, suggesting that understanding and navigating these interactions can lead to positive transformations. Augsburg (1992) also emphasizes that conflict is inherent and inevitable in human life, and when approached constructively, it holds the potential for transformative outcomes.

Barthel and Edling (2012) also emphasize the growth opportunities conflict presents for individuals and congregations spiritually. Bonhoeffer (1963) underscores that conflict is an inherent aspect of the Church as an interpersonal community. These scholars collectively affirm that conflict, far from being detrimental, serves as a catalyst for growth and development within the Church and broader society.

Conclusion

This study enhances our understanding of conflict in church settings by examining its definitions, inevitability, and potential to drive growth and reconciliation. It highlights that conflict is an inherent aspect of human interactions and, rather than being a barrier, can serve as a catalyst for positive transformation within church communities. By combining empirical research with theoretical frameworks, the paper underscores the importance of acknowledging conflict as a natural occurrence, encouraging church leaders and members to view disagreements as opportunities for spiritual and organizational development.

The research also emphasizes the necessity of proactive strategies for conflict resolution, focusing on the role of timely interventions, empathetic communication, and collaborative problem-solving in fostering unity. In doing so, it challenges the idea of conflict-free congregations, recognizing instead that conflict can lead to greater community resilience and spiritual growth. Overall, the paper offers valuable insights for church leaders, practitioners, and scholars on navigating conflict within religious communities. It promotes a deeper appreciation for the transformative potential of conflict, providing practical recommendations to help church environments thrive through effective resolution and reconciliation strategies.

Recommendations

- i. The paper is advocating that Church members should participate in regular training and retraining programs to develop skills and strategies for managing conflicts constructively within families and congregations.
- ii. The paper recommends that Churches should establish dedicated teams to mediate disputes impartially, facilitate reconciliation, and promote unity within the congregation.

- iii. We recommends Open dialogue and feedback mechanisms should be instituted to address grievances early and prevent escalation of conflicts.
- iv. We canvases that Pastors should emphasize biblical principles of forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation in their teachings to guide congregants toward healing and relational harmony.
- v. Church leadership should recognize conflict resolution as an essential function of the Church, integrating it formally into ministry rather than delegating it outside the faith community.
- vi. We canvas that Conflicts should be addressed by acknowledging and responding to the underlying human needs that often serve as their root causes.
- vii. We advise that Structured approaches such as mediation, restorative dialogue, and culturally sensitive conflict management should be adopted to enhance relational, spiritual, and organizational growth.

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