

Reconciling the pain with gain of Church leadership conflict in Zimbabwe

**Author:**Kimion Tagwirei¹ **Affiliation:**

¹The Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Kimion Tagwirei,
kimion22tc@gmail.com

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Since time immemorial, there has been demonisation of conflict that entangles Church leaders and congregants in Zimbabwe. Innumerable publications have exposed multifarious negative effects of ecclesial conflicts, such as dividing the parties involved, splitting churches and creating space for dubious and cultist opportunists to take up leadership positions at the expense of gullible believers. While this happens, focusing on the negative consequences of conflict prolongs the hurt and pain, while delaying healing, closure, peace and development. Thus, the positive effects of conflict represent a critical gap in need of attention. Employing qualitative literature review, biblical peace and conflict management principles, this submission reconciles the aforementioned downsides with the upsides of Church conflict, such as necessitating introspection and exposing hidden issues that need attention. It finds conflict unavoidable, yet sometimes destructive, constructive and indicative that certain issues must be addressed. All in all, it recommends that Church leaders should not delay, or rub off, but manage conflict and upgrade their conflict management as well as peace building skills in view of biblical precepts to stay progressive in any situation.

Contribution: This article reconciles the negative with the positive effects of Church leadership conflicts to achieve ecclesial and community development.

Keywords: church; leadership; conflict; effects; pain; gain; reconciliation; transformation.

Introduction

Since conflict is natural, endemic, unavoidable and present everywhere (Madalina 2016), mainline evangelical and Pentecostal churches have, over the years, experienced endless, multifarious conflicts between church leaders in Zimbabwe – even sometimes entangling congregants (Beta 2015; Chikwanha 2022; Chivasa 2021; Masengwe & Dube 2023a; Mbwirire & Masunungure 2019). Considering that most research on ecclesiological conflict, such as the sources cited, focus on the negative effects and management of conflict, it would be progressive to study the positive side of it, hence the significance of this contribution. Structurally, it begins by conceptualising conflict management, reviewing the nature and causes of Church conflict and then unpacks pain and gain in the Zimbabwean context. Towards the end, it submits recommendations and conclusions in view of conflict as reformative and transformative if managed well.

Conceptualising conflict and conflict management

Wherever organisations involve people, conflict is inevitable (Thakore 2016:7). Conflict is defined as:

[F]ight, battle, war, competition, opposition of incompatibles, antagonistic state or action of divergent ideas, interests or persons or mental struggles resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, external or internal demands. (Merriam-Webster:p. 1)

According to Omisore and Abiodun (2014:118), the concept of conflict is ubiquitous and pervasive and has acquired a multitude of meanings and connotations but is widely understood as a process in which understanding and interests differ. Conflict often arises whenever understanding, opinions, feelings, attitudes, behaviours, desires, expectations, needs, wants, beliefs, fears and other individual and/or collective concerns collide. Generally, if it is not managed well, conflict can take an ugly turn and have tragic consequences. As Omisore and Abiodun (2014:121) explain, 'each person has an individual way of thinking and behaves differently from others in similar situations'. So, conflict is inescapable as people can never agree on everything, at all times and in all situations.

However, conflict can be constructive if it is managed appropriately. There exist numerous secular and Christian conflict management theories (Folarin & Adelakun 2016; Kurtz 1982; Li 2018; Wolff

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& Yakinthou 2011). This submission refers to views of biblical peace and conflict management principles and Sande's (1997) peace-making and conflict management, which prioritise the interests of God, introspection, admission of wrongdoing by the self, apologising, identifying others' faults and committing to reconcile. Okoye (2012:15) perceives such a biblical approach as an 'I win/You win resolution' by which both parties confront conflict as a mutual problem and discover alternatives that satisfy their concerns. Such a collaborative engagement enhances active listening, identifies concerns, confronts issues from a place of otherness and promotes a wholehearted desire to find resolution. While differences are unavoidable, Jesus Christ called His followers to pursue peace at all costs (Viljoen 2021). Thus, Church leaders and followers should value, appreciate and practise conflict management in consideration of scriptural teachings for peace, closure and progress.

Understanding the nature and causes of church conflict in Zimbabwe

It is imperative to understand that there are different types of conflict, such as intrapersonal conflict within an individual, interpersonal conflict between two or more individuals and intragroup conflict among a group of people. In ecclesiology, conflict can be intrapersonal, when one person develops opposing concerns or feelings about something within themselves, interpersonal, when congregants or leaders differ among themselves, or collective through intragroup conflict, when congregants or leaders of the same church find themselves opposing each other. While conflict can occur at all levels, in Zimbabwe, leadership conflicts tend to be more eruptive and disruptive than congregational conflicts, mostly because leaders are more influential than congregants, and, therefore, their conflict often has massive effects. Tagwirei (2023a) confirms leaders' massive influence and reports that the majority of Pentecostal church founders and heads are neo-patrimonial and authoritarian and exploit their congregations for selfish interests. I am aware that some congregants are also highly influential and can influence change, conflict and division in churches. Congregants can influence serious conflict in congregational and Presbyterian churches, where they are autonomous, independent and powerful. Considering that the majority of churches in Zimbabwe reserve decisive power and influence for leaders, most consequential ecclesial conflicts have been triggered by leaders who developed conflicting interests, hermeneutics, theologies and doctrines. For example, Masengwe and Dube (2023b) historicise conflict in the mainline Church of Christ as being a result of poor ethics, hermeneutics and doctrine and the selfish interests of leaders. Additionally, Masengwe and Dube (2023b) report that Church of Christ leaders fought over church property, differences on church polities, policies and practices. *The Sunday Mail* (2015) reports that the Church in Zimbabwe has become a battlefield as a result of, mostly, selfish leadership interests. The newspaper lists a number of denominations, including Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM),

Evangelical Church of Zimbabwe, the Anglican church, Johanne Marange Apostolic sect and Zion Apostolic Church, as examples of churches that have become entangled in leadership conflicts. According to *The Sunday Mail* (2015), most of the ecclesiastic conflicts in Zimbabwe have been caused by quests for power, failed leadership transitions, opportunism related to obtaining financial and material benefits, an absence of clear conflict resolution mechanisms, carnality, bad relationships, poor hermeneutics and wrong doctrines and theologies. Similarly, Makamure (2017) uncovered that succession disputes characterise the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission. Mushayamunda (2012:41) mentions selfish enrichment, intolerance, political entanglement and succession battles characterise church leadership conflicts in Zimbabwe. Tshili (2023) reports that 'lately, churches have been rocked by conflicts revolving around leadership, succession and money related issues, which have seen churches turned into battle fields'. Although conflicts vary from one denomination, branch, team, individual and context to another, the bulk of church conflicts in Zimbabwe involve leadership, not the congregation. Following this, the sections review the negative and positive effects of church conflict in Zimbabwe.

Reviewing the pain caused by church conflict

Church leadership conflicts have entangled and disrupted countless leaders and followers and distracted them from the integral *missio ecclesiae* in Zimbabwe. This section draws on studies of conflict that has occurred in the biggest churches, whether Pentecostal, AFM, the evangelical church, mainline Anglican and African Initiated Churches (AICs). It unveils the spiritual, social, political and economic pain of ecclesial conflict, which, together, incapacitate most churches and prevent them from attending to the work of mission holistically.

Spiritual pain from church conflict in Zimbabwe

Jesus Christ said that a kingdom that is divided against itself cannot stand (Mt 12:25; Mk 3:24). Therefore, division bred by conflict affects the Church in Zimbabwe spiritually. Leaders who left their former congregations because of conflict ended relationships and may no longer be able to minister together with former colleagues to complement each other as they could before. Chikwanha (2021) studied the AFM and found that conflicts generated unrest in the body of Christ triggered breakups and legal battles and tarnished the image of the whole church. As a result, 'some church members backslide and those who want to join the church will not be able to do so' (Chikwanha 2021). This phenomenon is reflected in scripture, in the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17:20–23, which mirrors that believers can only proclaim and demonstrate the gospel when they are united by Godly love:

20 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – 23 I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me, NIV Online Bible Gateway.

That is why Hebrews 12:14 says that believers should make every effort to live in peace with everyone. Sadly, conflict diverts involved parties from love to scheming and fighting against each other. Chivasa (2018) unpacks AFM leadership and congregational conflicts over leadership elections, succession, pastors' performance and transfers, which have resulted in destructive and disruptive divisions, violent physical fights, costly legal disputes and backsliding. Netsianda (2015) analyses conflict in evangelical, Pentecostal and AICs and reports that the seemingly endless church conflicts in Zimbabwe distress and dismay mature believers, disillusion new believers, cause havoc in the lives of pastors and their families and bring reproach upon the name of Jesus Christ and the Church. Isenjia (2023) postulates that Church conflicts have diminished the gains of evangelisation and gospel witnessing in Zimbabwe, because divisions prevent leaders and believers from reflecting the light and grace of Christ that unites humankind with God and one another. The negative effects of conflict in AICs include divisions, successive breakaways and misinterpretation and abuse of scripture; many leaders ended up forming sects without adequate training or maturity (Beta 2015).

Social pain from church conflict in Zimbabwe

The Church is the body of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Rm 12:4–5; Ep 1:22–23) and the conscience of society. Thus, the Church ought to proclaim and demonstrate what is right and wrong in God's eyes and what humanity should seek (Uwalaka 2021). Instead, conflict tarnishes the image of the Church in Zimbabwe and its status as the conscience of society. Instead of influencing and transforming society to be Godly, loving, uniting and caring as the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13–16), conflict breaks the Church into divided, hating and careless alliances as highlighted before. The Church in Zimbabwe has become a battlefield in which leaders and congregants display their dirty linen in public and fail to resolve their conflicts amicably in private. Instead, they engage in public confrontations and sometimes in the middle of sermons (Sunday Mail 2015). Fore (2020) reports that the Church in Zimbabwe has become a war zone by succumbing to persistent battles, which may cause it to lose its moral compass completely.

The persistent Church wrangles have brought doubt to non-believers as they seek the place where devoted Christians go to and commune with God rather than self-glorification ... the Church leaders and those opposed to them have traded barbs and blows over who should be in charge ... because of monetary gains. (n.p.)

Similarly, under a socially disheartening headline, 'Silly season at Anglican church', *The Sunday Mail* (2016) reports that congregants post confrontational messages on social

media platforms such as *Facebook*, while others confront their leaders about turning ecclesial services into rallies and misusing sermons to campaign for themselves and their colleagues during election season. Similar verbal and sometimes violent confrontations have tainted the image of other Pentecostal, evangelical, mainline and AICs at various times in Zimbabwe (Madzianike 2020; Masengwe & Dube 2023b; Sunday Mail 2016).

Political pain from church conflict in Zimbabwe

The Church bears a prophetic mandate under the diaconal dimension of her mission. The Church is expected to live out *diakonia* by caring for the needy – everyone, everything – and to advocate for justice (Lee 2019), live out the mission of Jesus Christ by spreading the good news to the poor, to liberate captives and the oppressed, as well as recover the sight of the blind (Lk 4:18). Furthermore, the Church ought to be the salt and light of the world by influencing and exemplifying transformation. In the same way, the Church should engage in politics as ambassadors of God by contextualising the firm, bold and fearless prophetic tenets of the Old Testament.

The Church in Zimbabwe should be commended for speaking out and promoting national political transformation, both before and after Zimbabwean independence in 1980 (Hove & Chenzi 2017; Karombo 2018; Paradza 2019:3). However, it seems the Church has succumbed to political capture and lost its prophetic voice (Magezi & Tagwirei 2022). According to Dombo (2014), the Church in Zimbabwe became retrogressively divided as members developed contradicting views on political matters. Other churches took a stance that Togarasei (2018:33) describes as salvationist, quietist, indifferent and expressing unquestioning submission to authority. Although some denominations advanced their prophetic mandate by rebuking prevailing evils such as corruption, political intolerance and violence, many of them eventually submitted to political capture, became divided and lost their prophetic capacities (Chitando, Taringa & Mapuranga 2014:179; Moyo 2019). Because of the polarised nature of Zimbabwean politics and unresolved ecclesial conflicts, Gusha (2020) argues, the Church became corrupted, heretical and hypocritical as it adjusted its hermeneutics and theologies to please those in political power. Gusha (2020) emphasises that most partisan church leaders misappropriated Romans 13:1–7 and other related scriptures and heretically misled their followers to blindly and unquestioningly submit to the government of the day. For example, Tagwirei (2023b) reveals that some popular Zimbabwean Church leaders who are courted by Zanu PF misappropriated scriptures such as Romans 13:1–13 and demonised, divided and weakened prophetic voices to cow every citizen towards rallying behind the ruling party unreservedly, without voicing against repression. In light of this, it is insincere for the Church to preach love, unity, tolerance, peace and togetherness when it is conflicted, divided and continuously dividing. Consequently, Church conflict in Zimbabwe has been self-defeating because it caused the Church to lose its status as the conscience and prophetic voice of the society.

Economic pain from church conflict in Zimbabwe

Economically, conflict weakens churches. Chigwanda and Foya (2023) studied conflict in the Anglican church in Zimbabwe and unearthed that conflict causes myriad problems, which split the church and disrupted its income-generating institutions, such as schools and hospitals, as divided leaders engaged in fist and legal fights for control. Conflict disrupted sustainable communal economics as church leaders divided their congregations. Yet, as it is modelled by the early Church, when believers shared their possessions, communal economics met all people's needs together (Ac 2:32–35, 44–45). Reports by Taruvinga (2022), VOA (2007) and Madzianike and Madzimure (2021) confirm that those who lost court battles lost investments and assets that they had gained together. Although the economic impact of Church conflict varies collectively and individually from one denomination and congregation to another, both leaders and congregants are directly and indirectly affected. Instead of keeping and using what they had acquired collectively, conflict and fighting with each other separated their possessions and potential. While some of those who formed splinter groups have developed their own communal economies, others may never be economically strong as they used to be when they were united. Some of them have had to start over at the foundational stages, by mobilising funds to buy church stands, while others are building new halls, instead of multiplying what they had built up over the years when they were remained united.

Sadly, the Zimbabwean economy has been deteriorating and the majority of Zimbabweans are poverty stricken (Manika 2024; Muronzi 2022). Meanwhile, the prices of basic commodities and services continue to rise (Kandenga & Nyamukunda 2024); also, the operating costs of churches also increase. In this situation, conflict weakens the economic capacities of churches. People who have lost their financial and material resources have become incapacitated and can no longer attend to their mission holistically. Above all, the Church is affected.

The effects of conflict have not been only negative. The following section reviews the gains the Church has experienced from conflict in Zimbabwe.

Reviewing the gain of church conflict

While it is undeniable that conflict often has destructive consequences, as described above, we should appreciate that conflict can also have constructive results. On the basis of my assessment of Zimbabwean ecclesiology, I submit that ecclesial conflict necessitates introspection, exposes issues in serious need of attention, creates multiple opportunities for congregants to unlearn and relearns about their ecclesiologies, conflict and conflict management, as well it enhances diversity, growth, leadership development and succession.

Conflict necessitates introspection

The increase of ecclesial conflict in Zimbabwe has led to various introspective, congregational, denominational, leadership and ecumenical reflections about conflict and conflict management. In a thought-provoking story, titled 'When the Church Becomes a Battlefield', which chronicles various church conflicts in Zimbabwe, *The Sunday Mail* (2015) quotes a former secretary general of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC, which represents 'mainline' churches, such as the Methodist and Anglican churches and Church of Christ) saying that the ZCC has been deliberating on the issues of church conflict. The former ZCC leader commented that ecumenical bodies have no right to interfere in internal denominational affairs; nevertheless, they were identifying causes and strategies to engage and assist involved parties to resolve their conflicts amicably. *The Sunday Mail* (2015) added that the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum had held meetings and resolved that churches needed to seriously engage in peace-building. The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, which represents evangelical and Pentecostal churches, was also facilitating meetings with heads of denominations to discuss and share wisdom and strategies related to conflict and conflict management (*Sunday Mail* 2015). The same has been happening, congregationally and denominationally, from the grassroots up to senior regional and national levels. Furthermore, conflict has led congregants and leaders to undertake formal and informal introspection. As documented by the *Sunday Mail* (2015) and Chivasa (2021), churches that have encountered conflict have realised that most of them are problematised by issues related to embezzlement of church resources, unfilled gaps in ecclesial constitutions, extramarital affairs, leadership development, conflict management and peacebuilding.

Introspection provides a unique opportunity to understand ourselves better. It allows those involved in conflicts to reconsider their thoughts, emotions and behaviours. When people reflect on their experiences, they can gain valuable insight on what drives them, what makes them do what and how they do things. It is likely that such reflections will mitigate or prevent problems related to predicaments that churches experience; hence conflict can yield positive effects.

Conflict exposes issues in need of attention

When conflict erupts in churches, financial and material issues are common, though various internal, external and inclusive engagements reveal other concerns that simmered under the surface. The former ZCC secretary general mentioned that conflicts in churches have exposed the underlying issues in churches such as failed leadership transitions, scrambles for access to Church resources, the absence of internal conflict management mechanisms, a lack of leadership maturity and poor public relations management. According to Dittloff (2023), conflict can expose deeply buried issues:

Conflict reveals what our hearts hide from us ... We often don't realise, though, what desires drive us. They are hidden deep in

our hearts. So familiar that they've become white noise in the background of our day-to-day decision-making. Conflict pushes these desires to the surface ... In a busy world where a bazillion notifications consistently disrupt introspection, conflict can reveal motivations that have long been concealed. Until desires are threatened, we may not even know how deep their grip is on our psyche ... Conflict can expose deeply buried issues. (n.p.)

Conflict forces people who are involved in issues to stand out, speak out and ask and answer questions that might have never been dealt with before. It is public knowledge that every organisation has skeletons in its closets. Before conflict emerged in the AFM Church in Zimbabwe, congregants and leaders avoided talking about gaps that needed to be filled in their constitution and dissatisfaction about selective pastoral transfers, leadership transitions and national succession by which senior leaders overstay in power, redeploy their supporters and associates to economically strong assemblies while moving defenceless pastors to poor congregations. Fortunately, conflict triggered private and public deliberations. Although some of the deliberations led to violence and police had to be called in (Chronicle 2023), and some church leaders dragged each other to court after failing to settle their differences privately (Chivasa 2021), the conflict exposed various significant issues that needed attention, such as the neglect of leadership development, leadership transitions, peacebuilding and conflict management.

Conflicts provide multiple opportunities

Conflict provides opportunities for unlearning, learning and relearning about one's church. Congregants and leaders realised that they did not know each other well and rectified this situation during and after encountering conflict. So, conflict availed opportunities for the parties involved to unlearn what they knew about each other, to learn anew and relearn about their characters, interests, abilities and inabilities, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, conflict enabled them to know their churches better. It is through conflict that some developed a strong interest in studying the church's constitution, procedure manuals, policies, theologies, doctrines, dogmas and other aspects related to church governance. This knowledge is important for congregants and leaders to identify areas in need of improvement, to manage conflict related to those issues mentioned earlier from an informed position and to develop, individually and collectively. I agree with Calvary Pandan (n.d.) that 'a good understanding of the church governance helps the member to pray for and relate rightly to his leaders as well as his own service in the church'. Similarly, without adequate understanding of one's church constitution, policies, theologies, doctrines and related essentials, it is difficult to manage misunderstandings. Thus, conflict has had benefits, because it awakened believers to seek understanding. Two examples relate to the oldest classical Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, the Assemblies of God (AOG) and AFM. The AOG Church experienced a tribal split between Ndebele and Shona regions in 1986, which was, eventually, reconciled 12 years later (Tagwirei 2022:144).

According to Mpoko (2019:72), AOG leaders and members reviewed their differences, realised through various engagements and negotiations that more united than divided them. That they undertook reviews, negotiations and engagements confirms that conflict gave them opportunities to clear up issues and reconcile. In turn, the AFM Church experienced a series of leadership succession contestations that resulted in a major split in 2018 (Chikwanha 2022). The conflict and the resulting split gave them opportunities to do introspection, iron out issues and, eventually, agree to operate in peace, separately, as two different denominations (Pindula News 2022; Sunday Mail 2022).

Furthermore, conflict provides opportunities for healing. As Dittloff (2023) suggests, 'handling conflict as a leader can present an otherwise allusive opportunity for healing'. Dittloff explains that conflicts force the parties involved to talk out and empty their hearts, thereby processing healing after releasing what has been boiling up in one's heart.

Eventually, conflict also provides churches with opportunities to talk about and effect leadership succession and development. In the case of the AOG, Mpoko (2019:72) reports that leaders of warring factions agreed to set up inclusive leadership structures and, eventually, elected leaders democratically. Since then, the church presents winter and summer schools for all pastors for leadership development, and an elective national extraordinary meeting once every 2 years, at which new national leaders are democratically voted in. I realise that contexts differ from one denomination to another, and conclusions cannot be drawn and universalised. Nevertheless, most churches that have encountered conflict have experienced similar opportunities.

Conflict catalyses growth

While conflict can cause a variety of pains in the body of Christ, they can also positively enable numerical, financial, material and immaterial Church growth in Zimbabwe. Almost all numerically big Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, such as Zimbabwe Assemblies of God (ZAOGA), United Family International (UFI), Heartfelt International Ministries, Apostolic Flame International Ministries, Spirit Filled International Ministries (SFIM) were born when their founders broke away from their mother churches after conflict. The founder of ZAOGA, the late Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti, broke away from AFM, joined AOG, experienced conflict with the founder of AOG and, eventually, moved on and formed ZAOGA (Mpoko 2019:23). United Family International founder Emmanuel Makandiwa, Heartfelt International Ministries founder Tavonga Vutabwashe and Apostolic Flame International Ministries founder Oliver Chipunza broke away from the AFM church after they encountered differences (Mapimhidze 2012). All these churches are now much bigger than their mother churches. For example, UFI 'boast that over 70000 attend its Sunday service' (Taru 2024), and ZAOGA, with more than two million members, is one of the fastest-growing

transnational Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe (Tarugarira & Moyo 2020). In turn, the mother church of the AFM lost half of its members in the 2018 split. Presently, AOG has one and half million members in Zimbabwe.

Mapimhidze (2012) asserts that conflict also created opportunities to develop gifts and reform church governance:

The truth is that the AFM has failed to nurture talent and they start blaming these progressive young pastors when they start exhibiting God-given gifts. They church then cries foul when these young men move on. These young men have been suppressed by the so-called old guards in the church that have not displayed the gifts as stated in the Bible ... They are suppressed to the point that these young men decide to leave and start their own ministries ... AFM should also start revising their administrative principles because for record's sake they have a history of losing prominent pastors. (n.p.)

Additionally, Mapimhidze (2012) discloses that most of the leaders who broke away from their mother churches improved their hermeneutics, theologies, economics and mission. While some of the splinter groups are still developing their economic sustainability after losing some of their investments, as discussed under the economic pain of Church conflict, others, like the UFI and Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance (PHD) ministries, have become richer than their mother churches, arguably because of various factors. Sibanda, Ntombana and Jere (2024) attribute the rise of breakaway churches to the prosperity gospel of health and wealth, which enriches founders and leaders while impoverishing followers with false hopes. I agree with Tagwirei (2024:8) that some growing churches 'gained insight from their previous experiences and recognized deficiencies within the administrative structures of their former congregations...', developed mixed governance, aggressive preaching, worship and economic innovativeness that yielded massive numerical, financial and material growth. Thus, drawing from the rise of growing churches from the context of conflict, Hinds (2002) adds that:

[W]ell-directed conflict can keep our churches vibrant and growing ... where there is absolutely no dissatisfaction, no vision of anything better, and no pain, there is little chance of action. A church with a healthy amount of tension and conflict is a church alive. (n.p.)

In the Zimbabwean context, breakaways make up the majority of the fastest-growing churches. Chitando and Biri (2016:74) describe the growth of these churches as dramatic and intense. Togarasei (2016:1) characterises the growth as explosive, while Mwenje (2016) describes it as fast. In conclusion, conflict catalysed splits and resulted in subsequent numerical, monetary and material growth that capacitated churches to advance their mission integrally.

(Dis)Continuing church conflicts: Conclusion and the way forward

The negative and positive impact of conflict present a dilemma in which Church leaders may wonder if they should avoid conflict in fear of its pain or accommodate conflict in

faith of its gain. It should be borne in mind that conflict is a symptom of problems in need of solutions. So, avoiding conflict does not solve, but delays solving problems. Arguably, some problems can grow big, difficult and in worst extremes, impossible to deal with when remedies are delayed. In view of the fact that conflicts are unavoidable, and both destructive and constructive, this article recommends Church leaders to continuously upgrade their conflict management and peace building skills in order to minimise the downsides and maximise the upsides of conflict. In agreement with Omisore and Abiodun (2014), conflict can be progressive when managed appropriately and tragic if it is poorly managed. Because children of God must be peacemakers (Mt 5:9), Church leaders and followers should reconcile with those who have anything against them (Mt 5:23–24) by addressing their issues together, engaging others to witness (Mt 18:15–17) and help them towards reconciliation. The Church should never silence conflict. It should manage conflict to stay progressive in any circumstances.

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K.T. is the sole author of this research article.

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