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Managing Conflict in Faith-Based Organizations in Zimbabwe

Norman Chivasa

Abstract

One of the basic theories commonly believed in the secular world today is that conflict is inevitable which means that individuals and groups have needs, interests, dislikes, likes, partnerships, values and preferences which are often not compatible. This is also true of faith-based organizations. Using the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe church as a point of reference, this article argues that in Christian circles there is need to deliberately develop a perspective of conflict that reflects conflict as a positive force that generates both co-existence and growth in the church to counter the conventional view in the majority of churches that consider conflict as a destructive force. In the Apostolic Faith Mission church, intra-church disputes have a negative effect on the wellbeing of individuals and groups (the church) as conflict creates rivalry, hostility, divisions, hate, breakaways, among others. This is because a strongly adversarial attitude to conflict of all sorts is reflected in the approach of the church to conflict and in particular, some pastors have responded with legal action against the disciplinary activities of the church. Consequently, this article suggests that faith-based organizations should appreciate the importance of conflict for positive growth and development as a good number of Christians today are still pessimistic about conflict.

Keywords: Apostolic Faith Mission church, conflict, faith-based organization, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

The phenomena of conflict, world over, is experienced at different levels and in varying degrees of human interaction. This is so because “Every relationship... no matter how close, how understanding, how compatible there will be times when ideas, actions, needs or goals won’t match those of others around” [1]. In a real world such situations do occur and usually there are negative feelings that go along with them. For this reason, in some circles conflict is feared because it is viewed as a social ill that always negates development and a source of all distressed relationships that militates against harmony sustenance. While in other circles it is perceived as a necessary ingredient for human survival which potentially helps individual people to understand each other better whenever it occurs.

Within this framework, the contemporary world now looks at conflict as unavoidable and a beneficial phenomenon that exists wherever people live. This perspective demonstrates a shift from the unschooled and myopic view that regarded conflict as a vice to human survival yet when better managed it provides the opportunity to learn more about other people’s needs, values or rights.

As such, instead of working hard to avoid conflict societies must be ready through experience and training to meet and manage conflict constructively. Thus, well-managed conflict can yield up positive relationships.

This Chapter explores conflict management strategies employed by faith-based organizations taking the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM) church as a point of reference. The AFM in Zimbabwe church has set procedures to curb conflicts that potentially threaten the life of the church. By coming up with conflict managing strategies, the AFM in Zimbabwe church has acknowledged that conflict in itself is not necessarily a vice, but a challenge, which when carefully handled may benefit the church and society at large. Accordingly, the AFM in Zimbabwe church has also demonstrated a shift in its view of conflict by championing for the non-violent resolution of conflicts following a realization that human diversity does not threaten harmony but enhances meaningful relationships when the parties to a conflict keep engaged to dialogue following disagreements.

2. Research approach

The aim of this article was to assess how conflict involving pastors in the AFM in Zimbabwe church is being managed. To systematically achieve this aim, qualitative research approach was followed through the descriptive, explorative and normative tasks [2]. The descriptive task led the researcher to establish the current state of affairs relating to the nature of conflict and how they are being managed in the faith-based organization under review. The explorative task led the researcher to evaluate structures responsible for handling conflict in the AFM in Zimbabwe church. The normative task led the researcher to recommend strategies ought to be employed by the AFM in Zimbabwe church when addressing conflicts involving pastors.

Sources of data came through document analysis, in particular the church's two primary documents: Constitution and the Policy Document, which represent data for public consumption. Other sources of data include literature on dispute handling procedures of the AFM in Zimbabwe by Chivasa [3] and intra-church or group conflicts from Blackburn and Brubaker [4]; Schrock-Shenk et al. [5] among others. To keep an updated record on conflicts involving pastors in the AFM in Zimbabwe local Zimbabwean newspaper articles from Herald, Sunday Mail, Chronicles, Newsday, and H-Metro among other newspapers were instrumental. The major reason for consulting local newspapers was due to that conflicts involving pastors receive media coverage in local newspapers in Zimbabwe.

3. Statement of the problem

Conflicts in the AFM in Zimbabwe involve everyone from church members, laypersons and high profile leadership such as pastors. In the AFM church pastors are responsible for resolving conflicts, administering church doctrines, enforcing Christian values and constitutional regulations. The issue facing the article is if, for example, the pastor is engaged in misappropriation of church funds, extramarital affairs or some other misdemeanor, the church would not expand both numerically and spiritually. Such circumstances, if anything, generate discontent, break apart the church and blackmail the whole Christian culture.

Such activities religiously and morally stain the church's purity. For the broader community, now that the leaders (pastors) of whom they seek divine support are

involved in such vices, people who may wish to convert to Christianity may be discouraged. The key research question is who will help pastors to resolve their conflicts without causing the church to degenerate into a spiritually paralyzed religious body bearing the mere label of Christianity?

4. The rationale for studying the AFM in Zimbabwe church

Of the major Pentecostal denominations in Zimbabwe, the AFM in Zimbabwe church boasts the singular honor of having been in existence for more than a century. In 2015, the AFM in Zimbabwe celebrated 100 years of active ministry across Zimbabwe. She claims to have an estimated membership of about 2, 3 million. In 2006, the denomination claimed that its membership was estimated at 2, 5 million [6]. Due to lack of updates on denominational records, membership figures are liable to amplification [7]. However, commanding a large membership following was not the impetus behind the choice of AFM in the present article, but numerical age of the denomination was the major drive. The AFM in Zimbabwe is the oldest Pentecostal of them all in Zimbabwe. As a matter of fact, the numerical age of the AFM in Zimbabwe cannot be overlooked considering that the rise of other popular Pentecostal denominations in Zimbabwe (for example, Johane Masowe) which trace their origins from the AFM in Zimbabwe [8]. Other popular denominations that broke away from AFM in Zimbabwe which have been in existence for more than 50 years or so include Apostolic Faith Mission of Mugodhi which broke away in the 1940s and Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa which broke away between the 1950s and 60s. As if that was not enough, in 2010 the AFM in Zimbabwe gave birth to other popular denominations such as: United Family International Church, Heartfelt International Ministries, Apostolic Flame Ministries [7, 8] and the list is still on-going. Thus, numerical age was an important factor in the selection of the denomination under review, as well as the nature of conflict experienced up to this day.

5. Overview of conflict involving pastors in the AFM in Zimbabwe church

The AFM in Zimbabwe church is one of the oldest Pentecostal denominations in Zimbabwe, hereinafter referred to as a faith-based organization, tracing its origins as far back as 1915. Ever since its establishment, the AFM in Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesian African Church in 1915, was largely run under the supervision of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa but even then conflicts involving pastors have been an integral part of this church's life.

In 1989, the AFM's self-autonomy in Zimbabwe ushered in a new period in which the church encountered a multitude of head-on conflict situations involving pastors and the majority of cases arising from sexual immorality, violent tendencies, drunkenness, forced transfers, misappropriation of church funds, confiscation of church property, disputes over leadership roles and personality clashes [3]. To exemplify practical instances of conflict among pastors, the researcher identified cases that occurred between 1990 and 2018. The researcher, therefore, made a conscious choice of the period 1990 to 2018, which covered an upsurge of conflict situations resulting from the behavior of AFM in Zimbabwe pastors which resulted in the split of the church under review in 2018. Most of these conflict situations were both glossed over and degenerated into various levels of intractability, which have troubled this faith-based organization for 28 years.

For instance, in 1990, Masvingo Province experienced a conflict situation involving allegations of sexual immorality, leveled against a pastor by the church elders. After investigations by the Provincial Committee the matter was discussed in the Provincial Council meeting and a resolution was passed to suspend the pastor indefinitely. Another example of conflict situation of similar nature, an extra-marital affair, was also witnessed in 1994. The case was unearthed following reports by the church elders to the Provincial Overseer. The Provincial Committee made investigations and a resolution to place the pastor under censure for one-year pending reinstatements was passed.

In 1995, two cases were unearthed. The first involved a Provincial Overseer, who faced allegations of promiscuity. Following investigations a resolution was passed by the Apostolic Council to depose him from serving as Overseer with subsequent indefinite period of censure. The second case involved allegations of extra-marital affair, which the probing committee found no substantial evidence.

Also, in 1996, four gruesome conflict situations haunted and shook the church in the same year. A surge of tension occurred within one congregation following allegations of extra-marital affair leveled against a pastor. A report was forwarded to the Provincial Committee and the pastor denied the allegations. Following this, a resolution was made by the Provincial Committee to transfer the pastor to another congregation and the case came to a standstill.

During that same period three more cases heralded. The first one involved allegations of confiscating church property by a pastor and before investigations were made, it appears the pastor unceremoniously left for another province and the case was left insoluble. The second case involved allegations of polygamy. Following reports to the Provincial Overseer, the Provincial Committee made investigations and the matter was deliberated at a Provincial Council meeting and a resolution to suspend the pastor indefinitely was agreed upon. The third mishap involved a wrangle over the control of an assembly between a deputy Overseer and a junior pastor. Tension occurred following a decision by the Provincial Committee to place the deputy Overseer at the congregation which was already under a junior pastor. As pressure from the Provincial Committee was mounted on the junior pastor to create space for the deputy Overseer, the matter was left insoluble following the junior pastor's decision to unceremoniously leave the church to join another denomination.

In 1997, a resident pastor was alleged of attempted rape. The Provincial Committee made investigations following the pastor's arrest amidst allegations by family members of the victim. Subsequently, the matter was brought to court which some Provincial Committee delegates did attend and the pastor pleaded not guilty. And findings from the court proceedings were presented to the Provincial Council by the Provincial Committee delegates. The Provincial Council resolved that the pastor was to be suspended pending placement under censure by the Apostolic Council.

Apart from that, 1999 saw the province under review recording another conflict situation which spilled over to 2005 resulting in factions in the same church. Tension occurred following allegations of embezzling church finances being leveled against a Provincial Overseer by some members of the Provincial Committee. The case subsequently translated into violence between 2001 and 2003 and police had to be called in to restore order at the church premises where the alleged Overseer was stationed. The Provincial Committee and the Provincial Council discussed over the matter and recommendations were made to the Apostolic Council, which did not resolve the matter promptly. The Daily News newspaper of Tuesday 28, January 2003, confirms that police arrested the alleged Provincial Overseer on allegations of misappropriating church funds, common assault and malicious injury to property. According to the newspaper, the arrest followed disturbances in which the

Provincial Overseer was alleged to have teamed up with other members and turned the church premises into a boxing ring. After a week, the newspaper of February 4, 2003 reported that the alleged Provincial Overseer appeared in court for a similar case in which he was charged with embezzlement of church funds but was not asked to plead against the charges. According to the newspaper report, the pastor had loaned church funds to a church member who returned it within a week and instead of depositing the money into the church's bank account the pastor allegedly converted it into his own use [8].

Furthermore, after the alleged pastor's acquittal the Apostolic Council cleared the charges and the pastor's suspension was lifted pending expiry in April 2003, a resolution contested against by the Masvingo Provincial Council, which demanded ostracization of the alleged pastor from pastoral duties. Accordingly, the Provincial Committee refused to abide by the decision of the Apostolic Council and this resulted in the alleged pastor's congregation splitting into two camps. And the two factions waged bitter war to gain control over the affairs of the congregation in which some youths resorted to physical force to ensure their favored pastor retains control. As the story goes, about four youths were arrested in connection with fighting, demolition of church property, the use of force to take over the church premises and driving the church vehicle with flattened tyres [8]. According to the newspaper report, despite the alleged pastor's acquittal by the Masvingo Magistrate who declared that "There was no evidence for the clergyman to warrant prosecution" [8], tension was still raging between Apostolic Council and Provincial Council over the status of the alleged pastor in the church until 2007.

As if that is not enough, to give an update information on some of the conflicts involving pastors that received wide media coverage. The following newspaper titles demonstrate the size of the problem;

1. Just who is Emmanuel Makandiwa? Herald, 11 February 2011.
2. AFM should go back to the drawing board, Newsday, 21 April 2012.
3. AFM Church members in demo against overseer, H-Metro, 18 January 2013.
4. AFM Church Overseer accused of being used by the devil, H-Metro, 16 January 2013.
5. AFM Church pastors bribe overseers to be transferred to 'profitable' assemblies, H-Metro, 15 January 2013.
6. Nemukuyu B, Lawsuits lead to AFM Pastor's suspension, Herald, 13 August 2013.
7. Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe and other vs. Murefu.
8. Nemukuyu B, AFM top brass sued over 'looting spree', Herald, 31 December 2015.
9. Zimbabwe riot police beat up Waterfalls members in Church.
10. Jachi F, AFM pastor fined for ungodly behavior, Herald, 18 February 2015.
11. Laiton C, AFM Pastor screams at the High Court, Newsday, 28 February 2015.

12. Mbanje P, Fierce leadership row rocks AFM, *Newsday*, 14 April 2015.
13. AM Pastor, congregants clash, *Manica post*, 17 March 2016.
14. Kadirire H, AFM members want defrocked pastor reinstated, *Daily News*, 06 January 2016.
15. Mhlanga B, AFM fires senior pastor, closes Assembly, *The Standard*, 03 January 2016.
16. Chaos As AFM Finally Breaks Up, *Zimeye*, 14 October 2018.

In the first case, for example, the headline was a response following Makandiwa's decision to leave the church unceremoniously against the background of allegations of conflict of interests with the AFM in Zimbabwe church. Case of concern is number six, which records the pastor taking a complaint after misunderstandings against the church's decision. His decision resulted in him being indefinitely suspended. Another case of concern is number 15, which documented the ostracization of a pastor arising from misunderstandings between the parties to the dispute. Case number 16, represents a watershed conflict that changed the membership the AFM in Zimbabwe church. According to reports, the 2018 break-up was due to power struggle and other factors between top leadership involving the long-time and out-going church president, former deputy and the general secretary. At the time of writing this article, the once united AFM in Zimbabwe church has two rival church presidents one group has identified itself as the 'Original AFM and its rival identifies itself as 'Reformist AFM' with each camp claiming legitimacy and ownership of church property. These issues are still being decided by the courts of the land. From these cases, one can conclude that the church under review is more inclined toward adversarial position in which case the majority of pastors respond by going through the courts of law as they fight for what they consider as a violation of their rights (we discussed in detail on the principles focused on powers and privileges below). Against this background, this article assess the extent to which the faith-based organization is dealing with conflicts involving pastors with a view to recommend effective strategies. Whether the current strategies produced sustainable outcomes or just alleviated the impact or not resolved at all, are questions to be considered?

6. Conceptualizing conflict

Conflict is part and parcel of human life, and neither is the church spared [9]. As such, if the church wants to make the most of circumstances of conflict, conflict dynamics must be known. Although it is difficult to define conflict because of a variety of meanings in circulation, this article is closely associated with Adler & Towne's concept of conflict, who understand conflict as 'an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive conflicting goals, scarce rewards, and the other party's intervention in achieving their goals' [1]. There are two major points to remember about conflict here. Conflict, in the first place, is an expressed struggle that implies that it is an open confrontation. In that sense, when all the parties concerned become aware of their differences, that is, in one way or the other, conflict may be said to exist; each party involved must realize that there is discord, tension or clash between them.

Second, disputes are made up of interdependent groups. This is so because "Any relationship... no matter how close, how detailed, how compatible there will be times

when feelings, acts, needs or priorities will not match those of those around” [1]. The tension inside an interaction is crystal clear. Thus, as family, colleagues, workmates, church mates or neighbors, the parties experiencing a conflict engage in different spheres of social interaction. Since this article is interested in a church organization’s conflict situations, it is important to remember that faith-based organizations are like family structures. Faith-based organizations are made up of people who affect each other, such as the teacher of the Sunday school, usher, deacon, deaconess, elder, priest, overseer, church president, to name a few. The actions of one participant impacts others as these individuals interact, thereby necessitating conflict, misunderstandings or disagreements. Conflict thus exists during an interaction [4].

There are three levels of social interaction from which conflict frequently arises: interpersonal, intra-community or intercommunity interactions [10, 11]. Conflict at an interpersonal level includes tension between people. Conflicts typically arise from variations in personality, attitudinal issues, communication failure, different expectations, limited resources and incompatible behaviors at this stage. Such factors may also fuel tensions between individuals.

An Intra-community tension includes tension within a community between individuals or groups that can also erupt due to, among other factors, personality differences, attitudes or limited resources. A conflict between a pastor and an over scarce resources is a good example. A common example of an intragroup conflict includes tension between cultures or community members, a clash of ideologies between Christians and Muslims [10].

The majority of researchers believe that conflict is a dynamic phenomenon that can be positive or negative [10, 12, 13]. When contained, handled and resolved, conflict becomes constructive in a way that prevents it from escalating into abuse (harm by intention). In contrast, it is considered destructive and thus harmful when a dispute transforms into hate, resentment, hatred, animosity and hostility between the parties [13]. Conflict only becomes negative if conflicts or misunderstandings are not adequately resolved, then conflict will turn into a crisis that will probably have a negative impact on human life [14]. The possible negativity or positivity of conflict is reflected below:

Conflict is not always a mechanism that is negative. Conflict, therefore, is one of the most important positive forces for social change. It tells us that something is wrong; conflict is a growth and development driver. There will be stagnation without conflict [15].

The above sentiments imply that conflict is not inherently a bad experience, but it helps to reveal other people’s goals, priorities and roles, which can in turn foster development and positive social interactions between individuals and groups. This article is more concerned with the management of intra-church conflict.

7. An evaluative discussion on models of managing conflict in faith-based organizations

7.1 Frameworks for managing conflict in the AFM in Zimbabwe

The fact of conflict has contributed enormously to the establishment of an internal conflict management system called the Code of Conduct and Grievance Handling Procedure (CCGHP) in the AFM church in Zimbabwe [16]. Simply put, the AFM recognized that conflict in itself is not inherently a vice, but a challenge, which can improve the church and society at large when carefully handled.

The AFM in the CCGHP was established to act as a “guideline for rules and standards of conduct and procedures within the church to foster unity and discipline”

[17]. It is important to focus on the priorities of their CCGHP in order to assess the grievance management structure within AFM in Zimbabwe. There are institutionalized ways of coping with conflict in groups and societies [10]. The CCGHP is an institutionalized structure for conflict management at the AFM church in Zimbabwe. It includes policies, corrective steps, and actions to be made and recognizes leaders with dispute resolution responsibilities. A reflection of the aims of the CCGHP offers us the aspirations of the church under scrutiny in relation to issues of dispute. The code's goals are:

- To create consistent principles of code of conduct and maintain discipline within the church;
- To allow fulltime church leadership, lay employees and general staff to resolve conflicts among themselves;
- To outline actions that constitute disciplinary action-responsible misconduct;
- To state the disciplinary action that can be taken when the code is not complied with;
- To take corrective action in the event of inappropriate conduct or behavior; to develop clear, equitable and timely disciplinary processes that aim to remedy rather than punish unacceptable behavior; to include a vehicle or process within the church to address grievances [17].

The goal of the CCGHP was to resolve disputes in order to promote peace and harmony as desired results within the church. Another element of a happy church is unity. The mechanisms used by the AFM's CCGHP in Zimbabwe are built to create unity in the church. What is odd about AFM in Zimbabwe, however, is that the church mainly uses church discipline as its key conflict response mechanism in which the perpetrator is granted a period of censure ranging from three months to 12 months, depending on the nature of the offense as described in the Constitution of the church [18], Chapter 13.

7.2 Conflict-handling systems at the AFM in Zimbabwe

Despite attempts to demonize and minimize conflict by some individual Christians, there have been positive efforts by church leadership to deal constructively with conflict. The formation of the Local Council of Elders, the Regional Committee and the Apostolic Council to mediate disputes at the various levels of the Church can also be viewed as a positive step for the resolution of conflicts. It is important to stress that these structures are elected by a ballot system that uses the winner to take over all democratic processes and majorityitarianism. It is only the office of a pastor that is not voted into office, but appointed to be a member of the local council of elders [18].

A three-year theological training at a denominational college and the completion of a probationary period (internship) of at least one year are the requirements for one to qualify for the office of a pastor in the AFM in Zimbabwe. When employed to serve in an assembly, the pastor immediately becomes the chairman of the elderly council, which consists of seven adults. The members of the board are chosen on merit. One of the key merits is that such a person must pay tithes faithfully after which he/she can be elevated from deaconship to eldership, which is the highest rank before one becomes a pastor.

There are six lay staff on the local board of elders (mostly elders and, in some cases, deacons) and a local pastor as chairman. The local elders' board is responsible for the local congregation's affairs and this means resolving disputes at that level. The elders' local board is accountable to the provincial committee [17, 18].

Seven people are part of the provincial committee. The provincial overseer is the chairperson. An overseer is an administrative position assumed only by a pastor who, every three years, wins an election. The key qualification for being an overseer is that he or she must have reached the age of 40 years and worked in ministry in the church for more than ten years. Therefore, the provincial committee consists of pastor, elders and deacons who, on merit, assume these positions [18]. The provincial committee supervises a province's affairs and reports to the Apostolic Council. With political and administrative provincial demarcations in Zimbabwe, a province in the AFM in Zimbabwe does not drop squarely. There are three times more provinces in the AFM than in Zimbabwe's political and administrative provinces. The Apostolic Council, containing ten office bearers, is the supreme structure. The chairperson is the church president, who is chosen triennially from within the provincial overseers' ranks. The Apostolic Council is the protector of the Church and responsible, among other duties, for handling conflict [17, 18].

As evidence suggests, structures in Zimbabwe's AFM are built on the basis of experience, not necessarily on conflict resolution skills. Experience is supposed to indicate the number of years one has served in the church's leadership system. Some of the attributes taken from some biblical scriptures, such as 1 Timothy 3:13 and Titus 1:19, include qualities such as faithfulness, ability to lead, charismatic skills and good standing among peers. In terms of ability, a person who is chosen should be a dynamic preacher or teacher in either of these roles. Conflict resolution skills are also not taken into account when choosing individuals for leadership in the AFM church in Zimbabwe.

A more in-depth study of the state of affairs at the AFM in Zimbabwe shows that the development of the CCGHP can be seen as an effort to achieve sustainable conflict outcomes. However, these mechanisms (local elders' board, provincial and apostolic council) were challenged for not being able to deal constructively with conflict because most conflict situations appeared to have adversarial results where some pastors called 'black shepherds' or dangerous wolves in the skin of sheep are perceived as a threat. In most cases, it would be very difficult for so-called black shepherds to rise to higher positions in the church, such as overseers and president of the AFM. The boards have appeared in some cases to be used by some senior pastors in the church hierarchy to settle scores and create personal vendetta. These mechanisms are notorious in the AFM church in Zimbabwe for putting offending pastors under censorship, suspension and, in some cases, ostracizing them for good [3, 19].

Typically, after charges of sexual immorality were brought against them, three former senior pastors were indefinitely silenced in the 1990s. About the same time, more than 10 pastors quit the church unceremoniously in the Midlands province following accusations of insubordination. AFM witnessed a number of new Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe from 2008 to 2015, founded by their former pastors, who have left AFM in Zimbabwe with two influential pastors from Harare Province and another from Chitungwiza East Province.

These and other cases that followed are classic examples that have been tendered by provincial committees and the Apostolic Council to facilitate adversarial dispute approaches rather than to pursue reconciliatory approaches. One example of an adversarial approach is driving a minister out of the church. Adversarial tactics are listed as unilateral decisions [4]. In the case of AFM in unilateral decisions typically take place at the provincial level where the overseer may be a dominant

figure in the decision-making processes and procedures. Normally, the national executive endorses disciplinary actions. Dissatisfaction with dispute resolution has resulted in many court cases being brought in Zimbabwe against the Church and the AFM executive. Unilateral decisions do not always settle a conflict, but tend to reinforce factionalism, which can be more serious since certain parties with decision-making powers can attempt to force another party to bend to their will, which can often be resisted to create more bitter feelings between leadership and ordinary church members [16].

7.3 How should conflict be managed in faith-based organizations?

Due to conflict situations such as dismissal of pastors, insubordination, pastors accused of sexual immorality, misappropriation of funds, fabrications focused on personal vendettas, extramarital affairs or divorce cases, among others, the existing internal conflict managing strategies in the AFM in Zimbabwe church tend to be under serious strain. Drastic steps taken against some pastors due to the alleged conflicts of interests between pastors engaged in activities of independent ministries from 2010 onwards caused the offended pastors to leave the church unceremoniously. These acts are disruptive patterns of conflict that usually do not settle the conflict, but help to blow it out of proportion [5].

The move led to the accused pastors attracting a number of members of the former AFM in Zimbabwe. As for the pastors who want to stay within the AFM in Zimbabwe, they turn to secular courts for remedies. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, critics then accuse them of going against Paul's biblical stance that states that Christians do not pursue resources from secular courts, but resolve their issues through local church systems. Paul recognized that, because of Christ in them, Christians would never be driven by self-interest when resolving disputes in the Church.

If Paul had lived longer, He would have known that, Christians might be so greedy and biased against brothers who turn to secular or conventional courts. Incidences of case overload in coping with disputes in the church of the AFM in Zimbabwe also indicate that a large percentage of workers, especially pastors, have no or little training in conflict resolution.

Furthermore, the fact that the CCGHP was designed to deal with disputes without actually going through the courts, but there are still some conflicts going through the courts brings to mind a multitude of concerns as to whether or not the CCGHP is really achieving its goals. In view of this, it can be assumed that the CCGHP's capacity is not as efficient as desired, given that certain disputes, particularly those that continue for a prolonged period of time, end up in the courts of law, causing uncertainty in the church.

As mentioned in local newspapers cited above, there are many cases of disputes involving pastors, including, among others, two supervisors from Masvingo Province, one from Harare Province, one provincial youth leader from Harare Province, one pastor from Midlands North Province, and one from Masvingo Province and Harare east province to not provide an exhaustive list.

Conflicts in the AFM in Zimbabwe are handled, according to the CCGHP, by the Local Council of Elders, the Provincial Committee or the Apostolic Council [17]. Therefore, since protocols and methods are already set down, resolving disputes in the court of law implies that internal mechanisms have either been exhausted or that specific dispute may be beyond the ability of the internal conflict handling committee. In the same way, it can be concluded that it is a sign that the internal mechanisms of the AFM in Zimbabwe are either not sufficiently used or not completely understood that they go through the direction of the courts of law. It should be remembered that disputes that go through the court are expensive

and that route is not a fair investment for the AFM to pursue in the church of Zimbabwe [12, 13].

7.4 Principles focused on powers and privileges

The CCGHP is focused on values based on authority and freedom. As is often the case in AFM, a senior person such as the pastor, overseer or church president is responsible for coping with conflict in the power-based relationships. The attribution of seniority to dispute resolution is characteristic of the African approach to conflict.

As mentioned above, it is believed in traditional cultures that a senior individual has developed the capacity to deal with disputes over time. In addition, seniority is linked to wisdom to deal with any emerging dispute [19]. This seems to be the case with the AFM in Zimbabwe, in which the responsibility for presiding over certain disputes, especially those involving pastors, is provided to senior pastors or supervisors.

The distinction is that the relationship oriented African approach to conflict is driven by the desire to strengthen relationships or reconcile the contending groups as opposed to an approach that seeks to decide who is right or wrong, as is the case with the rights-based approach. There are several commonalities, but the rights based approach varies greatly from the conventional dispute resolution process. In the rights-based system, decision making authority is vested in the hands of a senior person, which suggests that the power to determine the outcome of the dispute is based on rank or position. Usually, in this situation, the most powerful party wins while the less powerful loses. This kind of conflict solution typically produces winners and losers in a real world, which ensures that the conflict will reappear because it remains unresolved [12].

A dispute resolution is assured only by a mutually satisfying outcome of a conflict. The management (in this case, the Provincial Committee or the Apostolic Council) relies heavily on laws, rules and regulations to decide the outcome of a dispute in the rights-based approach. Under this model, management ensures that laws are respected and that sanctions are imposed if not adhered to. The perpetrator is also not consulted in the process of imposing punishments, and the ultimate objective in most situations is to win over the perceived opponent or offender at this stage, thereby producing a winner-loser outcome. The dispute may seem to have vanished in some way, but since there is a winner and loser, it may come again, but at a higher cost [12]. The solution focused on rights does not really allow reconciliation between the perpetrator and the offended.

It should be understood that the settlement of disputes is focused on mediation between the parties to the conflict. It allows the parties to work together cooperatively (offender and victim, in this case the pastor and the aggrieved assembly or vice versa) by listening to each other, not with the intention of winning a debate, but to consider the situation, desires and needs of each other. Dialogue includes skills such as empathy, which is “to listen with your opponent’s ears, see with your opponent’s eyes, and feel with your opponent’s heart. Lack of empathy allows the parties to the dispute to get swept up and confused in the competition for “dog-eat-dog... [20].

Open communication is another important skill that sustains dialogue, as someone said: “People don’t get along because they fear each other. Since they don’t know each other, people dislike each other. They do not know each other and they have not interacted with each other properly” [20]. As a central element of dispute resolution, mediation between the parties (offender and victim) can also theoretically produce win-win results.

To this end, both leadership and follow-up in the church of the AFM in Zimbabwe will need to accept that the existing internal conflict management processes do not always yield win/win results, and possible reasons for this are that they are neither derived from the model of criminal law nor the model of African Ubuntu Restoration.

8. Conclusion and recommendation

The question that this article sought to address was how best can the AFM in Zimbabwe manage conflict effectively to help to promote unity and growth instead of fanning divisions, animosities and factionaries among the conflicted pastors? As results indicate, the church under scrutiny uses adversarial tactics that ostracize those with which the leadership of the church disagrees. The propensity of the stronger party to ostracize the other party to a dispute does not help to foster cooperation and progress, but rather fans factionalism as it produces win/lose results, generating animosities particularly for those pastors against whom loss is incurred.

Conventional wisdom does not advocate ostracization of the person or party with whom church leadership is in dispute, but rather encourages mediation between the parties to a conflict, the idea being that there is a greater possibility of better relationships if the parties engage in influencing the results of the conflict. This article argues that the church should accept the view that tension is natural and good for the life and development of the church in order to move toward a relationship-oriented outcome.

The whole church must take it seriously to deal with conflict involving groups and establish basic assumptions that there is nothing satanic about conflict. Based on selected biblical texts, which encourage dialogue rather than ostracization, pastors, local elders' councils, the provincial committee and the Apostolic Council must establish optimistic conclusions about conflict. In view of this, the article suggests that, in order to deepen their understanding of conflict as a positive force, the church under review may conduct conflict resolution training courses, seminars or Bible study sessions. AFM in Zimbabwe and its affiliate institutions that train pastors should continue to advance subjects or courses in Conflict or Peace Studies in their curricula to empower student pastors on conflict-related issues. It has been argued in other quarters that instruction in dispute resolution is not the essence of Christianity. This article argues that conflict resolution training is a valuable investment for the church and must be supported if the church is to help create harmony and growth.

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