

Chapter 6

Surviving the Storms

'Tis the set of a soul
that decides its goal,
And not the calm or the strife.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "The Winds of Fate"

As a leader, you stand at the helm of the good ship *Our Congregation*. Violent waves crash over the rails onto the deck. The ship convulses uncontrollably. You fear the whole vessel will capsize. All hands hold on for dear life. When will the tempest end? Will you even survive? That's the feeling of unhealthy conflict raging out of control. At its worst, it threatens to tear apart the hull of your congregational life. At the very least, it shakes your personal faith life. This is especially true if you are a leader.

Leaders usually take the brunt of conflict. It comes with the territory. When unhealthy conflict rages, leaders must stay focused on their individual tasks and their corporate direction. It's not unusual for those caught up in the conflict to pit leaders against each other in the triangulation game. In addition, blame may be tossed about in an attempt to see who will react to it, or better yet, blindly accept it.

Three critical areas of leadership in a congregation are the pastor(s), congregation council, and the committees or ministry teams. If you are in one of these leadership roles you eventually will deal with, and may become the target of, some form of conflict. Because of this, it's important for you to know your role and its focus. The crew will function best when leaders all know their places and fulfill them, even in the fiercest hail, wind, or rain.