I. COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course will provide an overall view of communication and the process of conflict resolution in the administration of the local congregation, including committees, boards, and staff.

Further Description
Ashland Theological Seminary desires that each student who is a part of its community experience spiritual transformation through the curricular and co-curricular life of the seminary. 

Communication and Conflict in the Church seeks to assist in shaping the core identity and character of the student by creating a classroom community and ethos grounded in Christ-likeness. Additionally, this course seeks to engender the spiritual and ministerial awareness that the work of the church in its communication and conflict resolution behaviors bears witness to Christ to the world. Therefore, communication and conflict work in the church must not be seen as merely pragmatic governance and operation, but as holy work. This perspective will substantially influence course content and classroom culture.

Class Presence, Ministry, and Technology
A foundational component in ministry in any setting is to be truly present with those to whom one is ministering. A ministry in the name of Jesus is one in which the minister is fully present i.e. attending to others with all senses. We remember that Jesus’ ministry was characterized by being meaningfully “with” others (Matthew 1:23 “…and they will call Him Immanuel”—which means—“God with us”; John 1:14 “and He became flesh and dwelt among us”). Since Jesus is our model and guide in ministry, and since the ministry of those taking class in seminary is to be a student, then one is expected to be fully present to her/his teacher and student colleagues during class sessions.

Technological devices, such as laptop computers, ipads, and smart-phones can be useful in accomplishing important learning tasks and have potential for improving the interactions between human beings, yet they also have the potential to harm human interaction and obstruct learning. For instance, in the classroom the above mentioned devices can function as a distraction from an important presentation or conversation taking place especially when previously mentioned devices are connected to the internet. Students can become so fascinated with the content on their computer that they fail to be fully present to the teacher and their fellow
students. Each student is therefore urged to practice full presence with others in class, regarding it as a ministerial-spiritual act, as well as an act of etiquette and civility. Plainly put, it is rude to engage in prolonged fixation on the internet or other content on one’s technological device during class. Furthermore, any student observed spending prolonged time detached from the class life through the kind of technological distraction described above can expect to receive a substantial reduction in her/his course participation grade. This reduction can come without notice.

II. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
As a result of this course, students will be able to:
1. **Demonstrate** critical and faithful interpretation and responsible use of Scripture in ministry related to the practices of communication and conflict resolution in the life of the church.
2. **Establish** communal and personal disciplines that nourish Christian spiritual formation especially as it relates to ongoing ministry in the life of the church.
3. Not assessed in this course.
4. **Demonstrate** critical theological reflection that is biblically faithful, historically grounded, contextually relevant, and integrated in the practices of communication and conflict resolution in the church.
5. Not assessed in this course
6. **Demonstrate** effective ministry skills relative to communication and conflict resolution.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Required Textbooks


B. Attendance
According to the student handbook, attendance at all class sessions is expected unless the professor has been notified in advance. Any student missing in excess of six class hours will be required to do additional work, receive a lower grade or withdraw from the class. This is at the discretion of the professor.
Further each student is encouraged to be mindful of how their attendance and participation in the course impacts the overall corporate life of the class. Each student is encouraged to be faithful in attendance and punctuality, practice “full presence” toward her/his classmates and professor, be meaningfully involved in the lecture and discussion, and come prepared for the subject matter of the day.

C. Assignments/Assessment of Student Learning

1. **Bonhoeffer Community Formation and Church Unity Reflection Paper.** Each student will write a spiritual/theological reflection paper on their encounter with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book *Life Together*. The paper will be 5 pages long and will have two parts. The first part will be to identify at least 3 passages from the text that influenced your theology of Community formation. Each student will include those passages in the text of his/her paper and interact with the passages’ meaning and importance for Community Formation especially as it relates to the local church. The second part of the paper should be reflections about how the themes of the book influenced your own views regarding church unity and/or church conflict. Feel at liberty to discuss how your own interpersonal style or perspectives have been altered regarding church unity and/or conflict as a result of the influence of Bonhoeffer’s ideas.

2. **Personal Conflict Style Reading and Reflection Paper.** Each student will take the Personal Conflict Style Inventory found in the Speed Leas book and then read Speed Leas’ book regarding conflict style. Construct a 5-6 page reflection paper in which you seek to identify and analyze your own conflict style doing the following:

   a. Identify which of Leas’ 6 personal conflict styles best matches your own experiences/practices in the “heat” of conflict. Note: If you think that more than one conflict style expresses your own experience in conflict then don’t hesitate to identify more than one style as your own.

   b. Discuss why you believe the conflict style(s) you selected best fits you. Specify what idea(s) you found in Leas’ book that were convincing to you. It may be good to include a quote from the book that was revelatory. Additionally, feel at liberty to share a professional/personal story of your own behavior in conflict that locates you in your identified style.

   c. Discuss your own level of comfort with your conflict style. Is there anything you would want to change about your conflict style? Is there anything you sense you need to change to be more effective in ministry? If there is something you want to change, identify what it is and why you want to change it?

   d. Share some ideas from the book that were revelatory to you about your own conflict style or about conflict in general. You are encouraged to include 2 or 3 quotes from the book and interact with them.

3. **Sande Reading and Summative Learning paper.** Read Ken Sande’s book entitled *The Peace Maker*. Write a 5-6 page paper which includes the following elements.

   a. A Summary of the Big Ideas of the book. You are encouraged to quote seminal passages of the author and interact with them.
b. Identify and discuss which ideas spoke to you most powerfully. Note the author’s ideas that you regard as especially important for life in the church.

c. Discuss ideas that were especially revelatory to you and/or you feel compelled or convicted to implement them in your own life.

Note: We are engaging the Sande book to especially identify biblical principles and practices relative to conflict resolution. Therefore, the above paper should reflect that emphasis.

4. Richardson Reading and Study Sheet Assignment. Each student will read the book entitled *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* by Ronald W. Richardson. You should be ready to discuss it in class on the day that it is due. Each student will answer a study sheet of questions from the book provided by the professor. Additionally, each student will submit a statement saying that they read the book.

5. Church Conflict Case Study Paper and Informal Class Presentation. Each student will select a conflict that she/he has witnessed in the life of the church and write a 5-7 page reflective-analytical paper about it. In doing this assignment each student will follow a case study template provided by the professor during the first weekend of the course which will guide the student into substantive reflection and analysis about the conflict in question. This paper is to be regarded as the summative expression of the course in which he/she brings to bear all the learning of the course into this assignment. On the final weekend of the course each student will informally present the case study to the class in a relaxed seminar style format where the class as a whole can engage in collaborative analytical-reflective process. This project is intended in part to be a collegial event. The professor will assist as guide and conversation partner in the unfolding of the assignment.

OUTSIDE-OF-CLASS LEARNING ENCOUNTER: ALBAN INSTITUTE ONLINE BLOG POST/ARTICLE JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT. Every 3 credit hour course which meets on weekends must either: 1) Meet over 4 weekends, 2) Have an interactive online component or 3) Have a substantial learning encounter outside of the classroom experience. In this course, we are having an outside-of-class learning encounter utilizing the Alban Institute website resources. The Alban Institute is an organization devoted to providing helpful resources to congregations and leaders regarding the manifold issues confronting the church. Of special interest to Alban is the matter of conflict in the life of the church. One will find a large repository of resources on subjects that coalesce around church communication and conflict at the Alban Institute website [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org).

Each student is to go the Alban website. Click on the link entitled “Topics” at the top of the homepage. A list of topics will appear which will include the topic of “conflict” and the topic of “leadership”. Each student is to read a total of 15 articles/blog posts there on conflict and leadership in the church. Each student should construct a journal documenting the learning experienced as a result of interactively engaging the article/blog post. Specifically each student should do the following:
1. Read the article
2. Take notes on what you read.
3. Document your learning in a typewritten journal. Note the following:
   a. Date and Time of learning encounter
   b. Name of the author/practitioner of the article as well as the title of the article.
   c. A 150-200 word synopsis of what the article was about and a mention of something(s) you personally gained from the article.

Each student will turn in their journal for review and grading by the professor on the second and third weekends of the course.

D. Calculation of Grade and Connection of Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonhoeffer Reading &amp; Paper</td>
<td>2,4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sande Reading &amp; Paper</td>
<td>4,6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson Reading &amp; Study questions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Conflict Style Reading and Reflection paper</td>
<td>2,6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Case study paper and presentation</td>
<td>2,4</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alban Institute Online Journal Learning Encounter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE AND CALENDAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekend #</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Lecture/Topic</th>
<th>Readings/Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1         | Jan 22-23, 2016 | Biblical and Theological Foundations: Toward a Constructive Ecclesiology; Practices for cultivating Unity in the Local Church; Skills, Practices, and Perspectives for Interpersonal Communication; Synergistic Decision-making; Personal Conflict Styles | Bonhoeffer Reading and Paper due—come ready to discuss the content of the book
Bring the Speed Leas Book to class (don’t do anything with it yet-just bring it) |
| 2         | Mar 4-5, 2016   | Biblical and Theological Foundations: Toward Holy Interpersonal Practices in the Midst of conflict; Addressing the Acute conflict: Levels of Conflict; | Speed Leas reading and paper due; Discussion of Personal Conflict Styles; Ken Sande reading and paper due |
Personal Conflict Styles (continued)

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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>April 8-9, 2016</td>
<td>Dealing with Antagonists i.e. Difficult People; Systems Theory and Church Conflict; Conflicts in Meetings; Church Change and Conflict; Student Case Studies in Conflict and Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Richardson Reading and paper due; Case Study Conflict and presentation due; Alban Institute online reading and journal assignment due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The above schedule is tentative and may be adjusted based on the needs of the student and the progress of the course.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

The Alban Institute (now associated with Duke Divinity School) has been since 1974, and still is, an organization devoted to providing helpful resources to congregations and leaders regarding the manifold issues confronting the church. Of special interest to Alban is the matter of conflict in the life of the church. One will find a large repository of resources on subjects that coalesce around church communication and conflict at the Alban Institute website [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org). Periodicals such as Leadership Journal, Direction Journal, and Congregations Magazine offer ongoing guidance as well in matters of communication and conflict in the church.

VI. SEMINARY GUIDELINES

A. ATS Academic Integrity Policy

Ashland Theological Seminary seeks to model servant leadership derived from biblical standards of honesty and integrity. We desire to encourage, develop, and sustain men and women of character who will exemplify these biblical qualities in their ministry to the church and the world. As members of the seminary community, students are expected to hold themselves to the highest standards of academic, personal, and social integrity. All students, therefore, are expected to abide by the academic integrity standards outlined in the Student Handbook.

B. Academic Support Services

If you need assistance with writing projects for your coursework, contact the ATS Support Center. The center provides free sessions with a peer consultant who can help you with all of your concerns about academic support including writing, critical thinking, documentation, reading skills, study skills, test taking skills, and time management. Contact the center if you have a question about how to complete your assignment, if you have documentation questions, or if you would like to have your paper evaluated for areas needing improvement. The ATS Academic Support Center can be reached at 419-289-5162 or by e-mail at atswc@ashland.edu.

C. Students with Disabilities

A student who has a specific physical, psychological, or learning disability and requires accommodations is encouraged to inform the instructor during the first days of the semester so that learning needs can be appropriately met. It is the student’s responsibility to document the disability with Disability Services located in the Center for Academic Support, Library Seventh floor, 419-289-5904 ssalvo@ashland.edu prior to receiving accommodations. Ashland

D. ATS Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>Superior achievement of course objectives, diligence and originality, high degree of freedom from error, outstanding evidence of ability to utilize course knowledge, initiative expressed in preparing and completing assignments, positive contributions verbalized in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-88</td>
<td>Good work submitted, commendable achievement of course objectives, some aspects of the course met with excellence, substantial evidence of ability to utilize course material, positive contributions verbalized in class, consistency and thoroughness of work completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>83-85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>Acceptable work completed, satisfactory achievement of course objectives, demonstrating at least some ability to utilize course knowledge, satisfactory class contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>74-76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>71-73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>68-70</td>
<td>Passing but minimal work, marginal achievement of course objectives, poor performance in comprehension of work submitted, inadequate class contributions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>65-67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below 65</td>
<td>Unacceptable work resulting in failure to receive class credit, inadequacy of work submitted or of performance and attendance in class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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VII. Selected Bibliography and References for Communication and Conflict in the Church

Church


**Conflict**


**Community, Communication & Reconciliation**


