BEING AN EFFECTIVE LEADER IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT
Some Principles to Consider

STAY ROOTED IN GOD
Your capacity to deal well with conflict is likely to be directly related to how closely you are rooted in God. Adhering to disciplines of contemplative and meditative prayer is likely to play an important part in such a grounding. Working with a spiritual director can be invaluable here.

BE A CALM PRESENCE AND STAY CONNECTED, INCLUDING WITH THOSE WHO DISAGREE
Conflict often produces fear and anxiety. Your ability as a leader to move toward the point of anxiety and be a calm, non-judgmental and sensitive presence is critical. It means staying engaged with people, their emotions and their issues rather than retreating or attacking.

INVITE AND MODEL SELF-DEFINITION
Model the capacity to openly state your feelings, goals, values, preferences and roles. This clarity opens the way for others to also define themselves, rather than simply reacting to opponents.

BUILD AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST
Trust is the single most important element in the healthy handling of conflict. Building an open, respectful and safe environment is the foundation for constructive rather than destructive conflict.

EQUIP YOURSELF WITH SKILLS, ESPECIALLY LISTENING
Careful, deep listening is a tangible sign of respect and is a central element in transforming conflict. Such listening includes temporarily setting aside your own agenda in order to understand what others are trying to communicate.

WELCOME AND EXPLORE DIFFERENCES
Create ongoing structures that invite dialogue, feedback and evaluation. Be wary of a decision that seems to be 'flying through' without dissent. Ask for other views and perspectives. Present different views yourself, even if they're not your own, so that diversity is encouraged.

ESTABLISH CONFLICT AS NORMAL AND PRODUCTIVE
Expect it. Don't let it catch you off guard. It is as much a part of life as the seasons – it's going to happen. Be open about its presence. Name it. Explore it. Invite it. Build on it. Conflict can be the stuff of growth and change and progress. Learn from it and help others learn from it. See it as an opportunity to learn new truths about yourself, others and God.

FOCUS ON PROCESS BEFORE OUTCOME
'Go slow to go fast.' Carefully planning decision-making and problem-solving processes and being clear about the steps involved saves much time and unnecessary conflict in the long run. The process is not only as important as the outcome but actually helps determine the outcome.

KEEP THE PROCESS MUTUAL – INVITE FEEDBACK
Invite feedback, suggestions and criticism from others. Receive it non-defensively, listen carefully and accurately, summarise the concerns before responding. Work to remove problems from a competitive framework. Frame it as a problem to be solved together. Validate the other and the relationship, and your commitment to both.

EXPLORE AND AFFIRM FEELINGS
Feelings are an important part of the process. Invite, acknowledge and validate the presence and expression of emotions. Explore their meaning. They offer a key to resolution and transformation.

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE SYSTEM / THE WHOLE
Your congregation and church structure is a system with rules and patterns and habits. Every interaction and every conflict is affected by the system and visa versa. Ask yourself what meaning specific developments and problems have for the larger system.

KEEP CONFLICT MANAGEABLE
Be proactive. Listen constantly and deal with issues as soon as they emerge. Sorting through differences of opinion early is much easier than dealing with antagonism and escalated conflict later. And if you don't discover that the conflict has escalated until too late, then don't panic, but make clear your intention to face into the situation promptly and appropriately.

KNOW WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP
Know when you are significantly out of your depth, then ask for help. And know where you can find that help before the time comes. Seeking outside help is a sign of maturity not a weakness.

REMEMBER: YOU CAN ONLY CHANGE YOURSELF – SO FOCUS ON YOUR OWN CONDUCT
Resist the temptation to focus on changing others. The success of a leader is more related to how he or she functions as an individual than how others are managed. Or, to use a sporting metaphor, the key to a successful team coaching is less a matter of how they handle the players than how they handle themselves. So focus more on how you conduct yourself, rather than how others are choosing to conduct themselves.