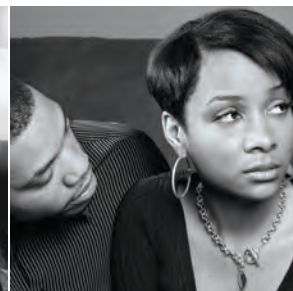


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including “I was hungry and you gave me food...” Brandner points out that it is not so much a matter of religious volunteers “bringing Christ into the prison,” But rather, He is already there, waiting for us to visit. Brandner distinguishes between crime and sin, but I did not follow his argument. Perhaps it is because I already have a well-developed experiential knowledge that the difference between inmates and volunteers is miniscule in comparison to the difference between each of us as sinners and a perfect and holy God. The difference is negligible, but for the grace of God.

All in all I highly recommend the book to volunteers and social work professionals interested in prison ministry. All might not agree on the theology, but perhaps all will agree on the spiritual and practical benefits of ministering to those behind bars. ❖

Reviewed by Terry Russell, Ph.D., MSW, MA, Professor of Social Work and Department Chair for the Department of Social Work for Frostburg State University. Phone: (201) 687-4691. Email: trussell@frostburg.edu.

Conflict Management for Faith Leaders

Thompson, H. E. (2014). Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press.

Conflict Management for Faith Leaders provides a comprehensive overview of conflict in churches and faith-based organizations and presents perspectives and practices for leaders within those institutions for conflict management. The author uses real-life examples and stories from Scripture, and provides contexts for understanding, assessing, and framing conflict using theories from both ecological and systems perspectives.

Critical to this understanding and framework, the book highlights that leaders need to be keenly adept and aware of their organization’s values, mission, policies and protocols while also being attuned to the relationships and culture dynamics of the individuals and groups within each environment. For leaders in faith-based organizations, this book seems to reflect examples of leaders mainly in executive positions such as senior managers or board members.

The author is perceptive in naming that, while from a systems and ecological perspective conflict is created by dissenting values or beliefs, there can be a multiplicity of other contributors. And before a conflict management technique is chosen, leaders should gather as much information to understand the contributors to any conflict situation as best as possible.

Moving from the first four chapters that focus on perceptions and perspectives of understanding conflict, the author presents a model of conflict management, using six “C’s” for techniques to address conflict.

These six techniques include managing conflict with (1) complacency, (2) confrontation, (3) communication, (4) coordination, (5) cooperation, and (6) collaboration.

For each technique the author presents a conflict scenario from an example of leadership in either a church or a faith-based organization. Moreover, each technique is explained and connected to stories from Scripture and the work of Jesus and his disciples as an exemplar for Christian conflict management. Although the author presents the strengths and weaknesses of each technique, the emphasis on a systems perspective of conflict management seems to suggest that leaders should prioritize the technique that best protects the reputation and integrity of their organization, no matter the cost.

For Christians in social work, whether leaders in faith-based or secular organizations, this can create tension or unease due to ethical dilemmas around exercising authority and power in the name of organizational mandates. Executive decision-making based from a systems perspective of conflict management may perpetuate oppression and create more barriers for the most vulnerable and marginal populations.

This book gives very helpful and practical techniques for social work leaders in conflict management, namely within the models of communication, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration. But it is when leaders exercise executive power in the name of the organization (which this book briefly highlights as a warning) that conflict management can become a tool for suppression. This suppression is of subordinates, who may be expressing concerns with deep-rooted values that, although with the best intentions of being Christ-minded, actually create a deeper divide and isolate workers and service-users alike.

This book could have been more helpful if it gave readers a caveat that it presents an understanding of conflict and conflict management techniques focused solely within churches and faith-based organizations. This perspective, which it clearly articulates, ultimately uses ideologies and values which reflect those of the Christian faith, but it might have been useful to provide realistic and perceptive theories and tools for faith leaders within non-faith-based organizational settings as well. In this way this book has the potential to isolate these Christian social work leaders in secular settings because these organizations may be assumed to adopt a secular perspective of conflict, which the author states is rooted in division and a threat to the homeostasis and unity of faith-based communities and organizations. Although both environments of churches and not-for-profits organizations are presented, the book is geared more toward leaders within churches and strictly faith-based or doctrine-oriented organizations.

For many Christians in social work, this book provides a good understanding of procedures and policies that are sometimes very hard to understand as a subordinate, but which ultimately protect the integrity and well-being of structural organizations. Or in other words, a perception that can be concluded from this book is that those at the frontlines might not always understand the bigger picture about what is best for their organization, unlike the leaders. This perception can help enable social workers to emphasize a communicative and collaborative process to help guide and promote healthy development of their perceived conflict, whether it be aligned with their organizational culture or not.

This book also lacks an emphasis on reflexivity and use of self as a faith leader in any context. Being charged as leaders means that the script or technique for conflict management cannot just be assumed to always reflect Christ's example; rather it is in the deep awareness of our self and how we reflect on our successes and failures that we promote the best environment for a critical perspective whilst maintaining the integrity of a humble servant. ❖

Reviewed by **Chad Bouma**, MSW, RSW, Mental Health Clinician for Qualia Counselling Services in Kitchener, Ontario. Email: chad.bouma@gmail.com.

Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness

Kathryn Greene-McCreight. (2015). Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015.

In this book, author Kathryn Greene-McCreight gives the reader first person insight into living with bipolar disorder. Through a transparent account of her struggles, the reader discovers how to best love, befriend, and help someone who faces a “major mental illness” (p. 25). The book is organized into three sections. The first, “Facing Mental Illness”, conveys symptoms, treatment, and social interaction in a personal and experiential manner. The author's presentation of her personal experience of symptoms is explicit and graphic. Some with similar experiences may find the descriptions unsettling and traumatic while others may find comfort in the congruity.

Dr. Greene-McCreight provides accurate information regarding treatment issues and modalities. Her personal narrative is descriptive and moving, leaving the reader with a clear picture of her support of ongoing treatment. Issues of faith versus illness are discussed openly and clearly. Christian worldview is expressed as the author shares her ability to integrate her faith with her acceptance of an illness that has no cure. Her