



Lombard  
Mennonite  
Peace  
Center

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## Leadership and Anxiety in the Church: *A Family Systems Perspective*

Since the publication of Dr. Edwin Friedman's *Generation to Generation*, many pastors and other church leaders have become aware of Bowen family systems theory as a way of understanding congregational dynamics. Family systems theory identifies differentiation of self and anxiety as two key variables impacting human functioning. The seminar on *Leadership and Anxiety in the Church* looks at the challenge presented by the rising levels of anxiety being experienced in churches today, as well as the role that self-differentiated leadership can play in calming such anxiety.

The seminar is comprised of a series of PowerPoint presentations originally conceived for LMPC's *Advanced Clergy Clinic in Family Emotional Process*. Works of art from the Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque eras are integrated at various points to facilitate theological reflection on the themes being presented. The full seminar would be appropriate for a continuing education event for pastors or a pastor-spouse retreat. Any of the topics listed below can also stand alone as a plenary address for a larger gathering. *The Road to Damascus* would be particularly appropriate for a judicatory or denominational assembly, since it can be adapted to appeal to audiences that include clergy and lay leaders.

The outline for a one day seminar would be:

9:00-10:15 – ***The Road to Damascus: The Church and Change in an Age of Anxiety***

- Anxiety in Action: A Congregational Case Study
- Linear Cause-Effect Thinking vs. Systems Thinking
- Distinguishing Between Acute Anxiety and Chronic Anxiety
- Understanding the Roots of Anxiety
- Societal Anxiety: Its Impact on the Church

10:15-10:30 – Break

10:30-12:00 – ***"They Know Not What They Do": The Scapegoat Mechanism and Church Conflict***

- The Scapegoating Process in Church Systems: Case Studies
- The Family Projection Process in Bowen Theory
- The Scapegoat Mechanism in the Work of René Girard
- A Girardian Perspective on Church Conflict
- Reflections on Christ's Passion in Art: Exposing the Scapegoat Mechanism to the Light

12:00-1:00 – Lunch

1:00-2:30 – ***The Importance of Not Being Earnest: Reversals, Playfulness, and Paradox***

- Understanding Triangles and the Importance of Maintaining Non-Anxious Presence
- Murray Bowen and Edwin Friedman on Reversals, Playfulness, and Paradox: Video Clips of the Masters at Work

2:30-2:45 – Break

2:45-4:00 – ***The Road to Damascus: Lessons for Leadership in Anxious Times***

- *The Conversion of Paul* in Art: Learning from Paul's Experience with Radical Change
- Self-Differentiated Leadership: A Key to Overcoming the Impact of Anxiety

The facilitator for the seminar would be Rev. Richard Blackburn, LMPC Executive Director. He has led hundreds of workshops on conflict transformation and mediation skills, and serves as a mediator and consultant for individuals, churches, and other organizations. He participated in Dr. Edwin Friedman's *Post Graduate Clergy Seminar in Family Emotional Process* and the Georgetown Family Center's *Post Graduate Program in Family Systems Theory and Its Applications*.

**Groups interested in exploring the possibility of hosting a workshop can contact the Peace Center at the above address or phone number.**