

## **The Politics of Ministry**

*Navigating Power Dynamics and Negotiating Interests*

January 8, 2019 | \$18, 216 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4150-9

*“Written by my three friends and collaborators, Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie share a combined one hundred years of negotiating ministry in the trenches. They present rich substance, timely practical resources, and case studies for applying biblical theology into the challenges of daily ministry. All for the sake of the health and mission of Christ’s church.”*

**Mark L. Dalbey**, president and associate professor of applied theology at Covenant Theological Seminary

# Politics and Ministry

The two words are rarely used together, especially these days. However, ministry means working with people. And people have conflicting interests. These interests lead people to act in certain ways. So, whenever people get together, they will be negotiating their interests. Traditional hymns or contemporary choruses? Children in service or in children’s church? Immersion or sprinkling? Group meetings early morning or evening?

In this book we look at politics from a wider and more neutral perspective than the partisan haggling on Capitol Hill. Here, *politics is the art of getting things done with others*. We believe whenever people work, play, or just hang out together, politics happens. Because—consciously or unconsciously, ethically or unethically—people are constantly negotiating for their interests. Therefore, ministry is political.

That’s what this book is about. We weave real-life stories of people in ministry through a discussion of four themes that construct the political experience: power, interests, negotiation, and ethical challenges. Added to these themes are the ensuing relationship dynamics involved whenever people negotiate interests with available power. The stories are real, but we have changed settings and names to honor confidences.

Bob and Donald were first introduced to these themes while studying with Ron Cervero at the University of Georgia. Ron has written extensively on the political experience of those involved in adult education. At first, perhaps like you, we were turned off by the term *politics*. But as we listened and learned, we quickly related his ideas to the events of our lives and work in ministry.

We realized that we were constantly engaged in the ethical and relational challenges of negotiating interests with others: with family members, people at church, work colleagues, and friends. Then we began to see these same dynamics played out in Scripture as the gospel affected people in their social contexts. Eventually we both ended up teaching about educational ministry and leadership, together with our colleague Tasha Chapman, who added to our shared understanding and continuing research of politics in life and in ministry.

After years of researching and testing these ideas in classrooms, leadership seminars, ministry consultations, and our own churches, we now share them with you.

—Taken from the introduction

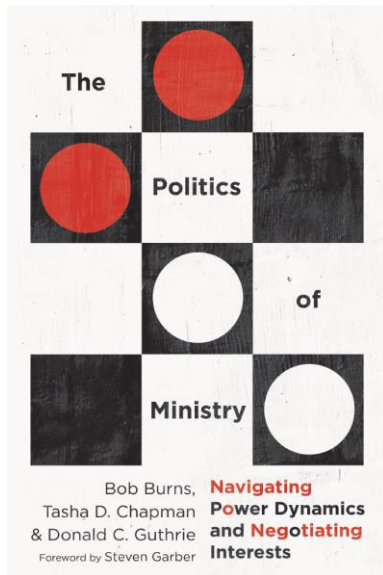


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At its most basic level, *politics* is simply the everyday activity of getting things done with other people. Filled with real-life stories, this book from Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie combines their long ministry experience with sociological research, setting out wise principles and practices that help us see more clearly the political dynamics at play in our churches and parachurch ministries.

## Ministry Is Political

### Why did you decide to write *The Politics of Ministry*?

**Bob Burns:** Donald and I first learned of this perspective on politics in our graduate studies. We both found that it named the realities of what we had both faced in years of ministry. And after learning it, the ideas continued to help us understand and navigate the realities of ministry life. Later, when teaching together, Tasha was drawn into the conversation and, again, discovered these ideas identified experiences she had in ministry life.

We are addressing the day-to-day discussions, interactions, and implementation of ministry, which happens in the context of relationships between those leading and participating in ministry. Truly, where “two or three are gathered,” there is politics!

### How exactly are politics at play in the work of ministry?

**Bob:** Every human being has interests. Some we recognize; many we don’t. Whenever two or more are working together, their interests are being negotiated. These negotiations take place in relational settings that form and structure people’s capacity to act on their interests. So the political experience of life (and ministry!) is when interests are being negotiated in the context of relationships (social contexts), which is where people exercise their capacity to act (power).

### What do you hope readers take away from this book?

**Bob:**

- We hate the word *politics* because we feel it represents manipulation, coercion, and underhanded dealings. However, when seen as the negotiation of interests, we discover that all of us are involved in politics every day.
- Therefore, ministry is political. All of us want to get things done. Ministry is work done in Jesus’ name for his kingdom. Yet it is done in and through people. Working together with others can be messy. We want to identify why this messiness happens and what can be done for us to work together in healthy, God-honoring ways.
- People enter ministry assuming everyone will love each other, get along, and work on things in peaceful harmony. However, this is not realistic biblically nor pragmatically. We are broken people in a broken world, “working out our salvation” together. We seek to identify the challenges of working together and present healthy, responsible ways to address differences and seek God’s kingdom first.
- This is not a simplistic, how-to book. Life, relationships, and ministry don’t work that way. Rather, we present a framework and a set of tools to identify the realities of what is being faced and options on how to move forward. At the same time, we grapple with the ethical challenges faced when we cannot seem to work through things.

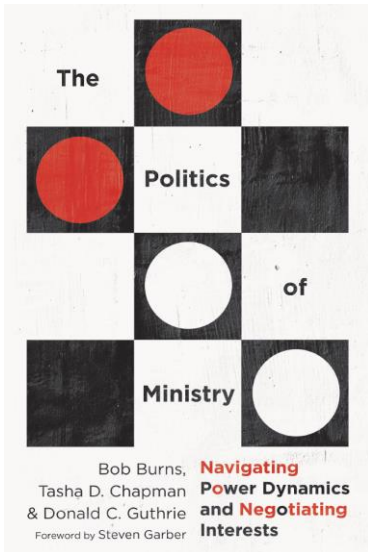


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## Coauthors with a Combined 100 Years of Experience Help Navigate the Politics of Ministry

*"Drawing on years of teaching and ministry experience, Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie have provided readers with a wise, thoughtful, helpful, and insightful guide regarding ministry and church relationships. Addressing issues of power, interests, and negotiation, our authors point readers toward opportunities for redemption and resilience in both relationships and structures for the good of the gospel and the edification of the church. Drawing on case studies and providing direction for personal or group reflection, the book is focused on authentic application for those new to ministry, for those with a long tenure in ministry, as well as for those who have experienced pain, setback, and disappointment in ministry. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie are to be highly commended for this most important work, which I am delighted to recommend."*

—David S. Dockery, president of Trinity International University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School



**Bob Burns** (PhD, University of Georgia) is the pastor of spiritual formation at Church of the Good Shepherd in Durham, North Carolina. He was previously dean of lifelong learning and associate professor of education ministries at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He is ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America. He is coauthor of *Resilient Ministry* with Tasha D. Chapman and Donald C. Guthrie.



**Tasha D. Chapman** (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is associate dean of lifelong learning and adjunct professor of educational ministries at Covenant Seminary. She is coauthor of *Resilient Ministry* with Bob Burns and Donald C. Guthrie.



**Donald C. Guthrie** (PhD, University of Georgia) is professor of educational ministries at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Guthrie has a broad range of past experience serving the university sphere over the years as campus minister, vice president for academics, and director of several university programs and conferences. He is coauthor of *Resilient Ministry* with Bob Burns and Tasha D. Chapman.



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