

Stop, Reflect, Pray, and Listen

If you went to church in Westfield last week, you may have heard some of this.

However, it may bear repetition.

How do you deal with conflict? Do you avoid it? Ignore it? Deal with it head on?

(Depending on the mood of the congregation, there may be some discussion.) I am someone who used to avoid it. I then switched to someone who ignored it but then, due to some positions that I had in school administration and corporate HR, I learned how to deal with it head on. My preference is to avoid it when possible.

In our reading from Genesis, we do a little backtracking, but still see the conflict between Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. Poor Abraham gets stuck in the middle. You see, when God promises Abraham and Sarah that they would be the parents of a whole new nation, Sarah realizes that this family will not come from her as she has not become pregnant. She tells Abraham to take her maidservant, Hagar, and “have relations” with her in order to bear a son to make the “whole new nation.”

Remember, a few weeks ago, we heard the reading of the visitors who were messengers from God who stopped by to see Abraham. They told Abraham that Sarah would conceive a son. Now, Sarah, who was past childbearing age and could have already experienced menopause, laughed when she heard this message. However, Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac. Sarah was determined to make Isaac the sole heir and had Abraham send Hagar and Isaac away from them.

So, here is where we have some conflict.

- Sarah willingly gave Hagar to her husband; however, Sarah became jealous when Hagar produced an heir (Ishmael)
- Abraham loved Ishmael and was grateful to Hagar for giving him a son
- When Sarah sees Isaac and Ishmael playing together, she is angry as she wants Isaac to be the sole heir. She demands that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away
- The problem was, though, that there was truly nowhere to go. Hagar had no husband, no means to support herself and Ishmael, and simply thought that they were going to die.

The conflicts were numerous!

Do we still have conflicts today? Of course we do! People argue, fight, discuss, etc., about almost everything. There were some conflicts in 2021 when the Search Committees of Southwick and First Westfield wanted to call me as pastor. Heck, there was even a conflict on the Search Committee. However, things find a way of working out and making things right.

Could there be conflict as the two churches move forward? There could be, because the two churches, while enjoying a friendship, have grown to realize that they are different and that it is ok to name their differences. While I am not involved in any of the discussions that will take place within the two churches or among the two churches, I would like to offer some advice that you may have read about in a newsletter or you will see as you await the summer edition of The Gold Dome.

If there is a conflict that comes to light in your discussions, it is important to be honest and say what is on your mind. Remember, you can be honest without being mean. If the conversation is getting heated, I suggest that you simply STOP the conversation. Both

or all parties need to take a break and move away or just sit silently to REFLECT on what was said and, perhaps, why it was said. Then, I suggest that all involved PRAY together. Call on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to see if you can hear or sense what God may be saying to you. However, in order to know what might be said, you have to LISTEN.

If Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar had done these things, maybe they wouldn't be in the conflict that they experienced. I am not saying there is going to be a conflict but, if there is, please remember to

- STOP
- REFLECT
- PRAY
- LISTEN

Amen!