



Reconciliation: Conflict Transformation

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” Matt 5:9

“Making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1.20)

Conflict:

To be human is to be in relationship

To be in relationship is to be in community

To be in community is to face difference

To face difference is to entertain the possibility of conflict.

Conflict does not have to be destructive, if handled constructively

Transformation not resolution

Resolution focuses on ‘fixing’ and removing a problem.

Transformation focuses on securing and deepening the relationships that frames the conflict, enabling us to continue to journey together – it is this, which is the focus of our work.

Definitions

Conflict is “a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals.” (Donohue and Kolt)

‘Conflict equals differences plus tension’ (Caroline Schrock-Shenk)

Difference

How do we experience difference?

What do we notice?

What do we not?

How do communities experience difference?

How does the church experience difference?

The Role of Power

'conflict is nearly always related to issues around power and influence'

'the test of whether our use of power is redemptive or abusive is our treatment of the least powerful' (Alastair McKay)

What are the power structures in society?

The power structures in the church:

Spiritual – Supernatural

Sacramental – Preferences for our forms of worship

Political – Pressure groups

Relational – Belonging

Denominational – How the church is structured

Theological – Agreed doctrine

Institutional – Governance

Hierarchical – Leadership styles

Corporate – Decision taking at meetings

Social – Conformity / identity

Unarticulated factors

In conflict we are 'renegotiating the quality of our relationships, our expectations of each other, our interpretation of our identity as individuals and as a family, and the nature of power and decision-making in our relationship.' (Lederach)

Elements of Conflict

- **Episode** - the specific presenting event
- **Epicentre** - underlying context and patterns of behaviour
- **Conceptual framework** - that which connects the problem with the relationship

Relationships

Asymmetrical / Symmetrical?

We are developing an understanding:

of ourselves - emotional intelligence

of others - social intelligence

of how the conflict grew and its ingredients

of the high value of our relationships

that peace requires justice

The Pathway to Reconciliation

The Matt 18 Principle:

Who is the greatest? v1 – 5

Humility and honesty v6 – 9

Recovering a wandering soul v10 – 14

If your brother/sister sins against you v15 - 20

How many times do I forgive; seek reconciliation? v21 – 22

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant v23 - 34

Jesus' closing statement v35

Forgiveness is:

giving up the right to be right

giving up the right to revenge

giving up the right to be justified – releasing you

accepting the gift of beginning again

moving towards the future not rehearsing the past

facing our pain and disappointment – being honest

Q. How do we make the church a safe place to disagree and a secure place to find reconciliation?

Different Attitudes

- Don't be afraid of conflict - there are new possibilities on the other side of the door.
- Separate the issues from your emotions
- Don't judge the people - assess the problem
- Ask: What else is being renegotiated here?
- Apply the Matt 18 principle – make relationship the key factor
- Ask what are they/am I afraid of losing?
- Avoid debate via email!
- Listen more than you talk!

Different Questions

Not - 'what did you do?' but 'how has this impacted you?'

Not – 'whose fault is this?' but 'how did we get here?'

Not – 'can't you just move on?' but 'why is this important to you?'

Not – 'what did they do?' but 'what might you have done differently?'

Not – 'what must happen to end this?' but 'what can you do to bring peace here?'

Peacemakers are three-fold facilitators

Listening / healing / reconciling

Listening

"Let us listen to one another with humility, civility and kindness so as to create space for the kind of civil discourse that will give birth to a promising future rather than a haunted past."

Dr John Sentamu

Giving people a safe, non-judgmental space to explore their concerns without interruption or interpretation (finding their own answers)

An act of respect and service that requires us to put the other person's story before our own (coming alongside, being there)

Not finishing people's sentences

Not framing their story through our lens
Not needing to 'fix' their lives
Finding an ease with silence
Paying full attention
Body language / eye contact / no clock watching!

Healing

A journey into wholeness and well-being.
A process of transforming disease into ease where there is fuller harmony of mind, body and spirit. This is true shalom.

Reconciliation

Growing a new relationship out of the ashes of the old.
Transforming / Restoring broken relationships between both individuals and communities.
A focus beyond the episode
Justice and peace together

The three-fold approach

connects with the dynamic of journey
attends to relationship building
the call to recover our human dignity
put aside our personal preferences and wholly attend to the story of the other

The Mechanics of Conflict Transformation

Being a Peacemaker – about you

- Your goal is to not make a judgment about what you have heard from both parties, nor to form a 'fix it' solution to remove the problem.
- The most wholesome and enduring transformation will be one that the parties come to themselves, and do so together.
- The presence of this conflict situation may be exactly what the Holy Spirit has drawn them to, in order to focus attention on personal 'life' issues as well as the matters between them. We deal with the whole person, holistically, so enabling each individual to identify all the issues is as vital as the identifying the conflict itself.
- It is important to approach this process through prayer, ensuring that your own heart and life are free from 'conflict' with anyone else. Through this process you may well have life issues you will need to reflect on, but be aware that we, too, can react to statements from others because of our own history or current reality.
- Be aware that frustration can arise in those you are serving and in yourself as well. Intransigence and ignorance are common bedfellows, and pain can mask clarity. Keeping prayerful throughout is key.
- Respond. Do not react. Reactions are instant and often more visceral. Response is found through reflection and silence. Do not be afraid to wait – longer than the social norm – for God to frame your words.
- Do not be afraid to allow silence for those involved to have time to reflect – do not fill any silence with words when a person is responding to a question or issue. We do not always help people by doing the work for them.

Conflict Transformation

Ground rules for face to face meetings

- Everyone here is unique, precious, and loved by God
- Our goal is to find a godly solution that will strengthen and transform the relationship that has been damaged.
- We will treat one another with respect and honour
- We have not come to apportion blame or to solve a problem but to transform the situation, allowing you either to continue in relationship or to part amicably
- We will not interrupt each other
- We will not make inflammatory comments/remarks (“She did this, you said that”. Instead of using phrases like ‘you did ...’ we will say how we felt.)
- We will not use negative body language, anger or tears to get our point across (raised hands, pointing, raised voices)
- We are committed to telling the truth and being honest about our feelings
- We are prepared to admit where we have been wrong and ask forgiveness for any hurt caused even if our actions were unintentional
- We will be open to input from godly counsel which applies the scriptures to this situation, and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit
- As a peacemaker, I will gently challenge if at any time these arrangements are lost sight of or forgotten.

Conflict Transformation

Approach A – a simplified approach

[Remember, as a facilitator / peacemaker, you are the point of security for both parties]

Outline

- **Explain the ground rules for ‘face to face’ meetings (see below)**

Ask both parties by name - “Do you agree to this?”

Ask each party in turn - “Will you tell me briefly what you feel the difficulty is and how you feel about it”. Both parties should be instructed to direct their comments initially to the facilitator – not to the other person.

(The facilitator seeks to understand if the presenting issue is the real issue – or is it just a symptom of a bigger relationship breakdown? Remind both parties not to interrupt. Should people interrupt or become emotional then the facilitator will intervene and restore order, even calling a brief moment of silence for reflection.)

Party A speaks - no comment from the facilitator, except for thanking them for their honesty

Party B speaks - not to answer the points of party A but to tell their own story

The facilitator should recap briefly both perspectives

Party A is given the opportunity to clarify any points

Party B is given the opportunity to clarify any points

Ask each person the question 'What is the most important thing you have heard in the other's story?'

Ask each party to express how they feel having heard the other person speak - not just the words of the story but the feelings and emotions behind it.

The facilitator asks both parties what on reflection they might have done differently to bring justice and peace to the relationship – and what might be done now to bring healing and reconciliation.

Each party should be prepared to admit where their conduct could be viewed as unhelpful and ask for the forgiveness of the other where this was so.

Leader's comments - this is for the facilitator to present the relationship dispassionately and then outline the common elements of the difficulty, seeking to define the way ahead within Biblical principles.

Solutions and reconciliation: ask both parties what they themselves could now do to be reconciled with the other.

Once both parties have spoken, the facilitator then describes or, if necessary, proposes the way ahead (with practical counsel) and asks both parties to agree on the joint decision (ideally!)

If there is still an obstacle or an unwillingness to reconcile parts of the process might need repeating. It helps to recognise the hurt that has been felt (even if caused inadvertently) and ask the person to express their feelings. You may need to help them do this appropriately.

Prayer

Once agreement has been established, A and B pray blessing on each other and then the facilitator prays for both parties, possibly using the prayer below:

Today, Father, we lift to you all those whose relationship with you has been broken by sin; all those who have given up trying to return to you, perhaps because they are unable to forgive themselves; all who find it difficult to be reconciled with their family or friends and so find it hard to be at one with you.

Stretch out your healing hand upon them, Christ our Healer and Saviour, and draw them to yourself; forgive them and restore them to fellowship with you, so they may know what it is to come to themselves and to be reconciled with their brothers and sisters. Give them courage to take the first step and make the first move.

Then, Holy Spirit, shed the love of God abroad in their hearts, that men and women may take knowledge of them that they have been in your presence and so may feel better for being theirs.

Grant us all to know this great joy of your forgiveness and the restoration to a richer relationship with you than we ever had before, unceasing because it is of you, O Holy Trinity, to whom be endless glory, praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

(Taken from A Healing House of Prayer by Bishop Morris Maddocks)

Approach B

[Remember, as a facilitator / peacemaker, you are the point of security for both parties]

Listen to both parties individually (separately) –this allows a safe place for truth, emotion and pain to be expressed. You do not make a judgment about what you have heard from both parties.

You are listening to their story: Episode, Epicentre, & Conceptual framework

You are listening to their 'life story': How they have arrived at this point in their lives.

Hopes, fear, pains, expectations

•

Identifying how they feel about the place they have come to personally, and relationally?
conclusions, decisions, emotions. Assumptions

Understanding 'difference'

•

Identifying with the 'other'. Lead each person to consider the 'other' – to walk in their shoes

•

Question: What is the most important thing you have told me? (active listening)

•

Question: What would you personally like to do about this now?

•

Listening to each other's story – (articulate the ground rules if necessary) Once you have listened to all parties tell their story agree a mutually convenient time for you all to meet, on neutral ground, in a comfortable environment and a time when no one is hurried. Each person starts by addressing you as 'peacemaker' not the other person (make sure you have emphasized this). The other party listens to their story.

Once the first has finished the second tells their story – not in response to the first but as a unique story in its own right and still addressed to the 'peacemaker'

Focus each person on owning their own part in the story not projecting fault on to the 'other'

•

Recap the whole story, making one narrative out of the two parts. Ask each person how he or she feels about the whole story.

This is a 3-way conversation from this point! Please emphasise this

•

Question: In listening to the whole story how do you feel about what occurred?

How do you feel about the relationship between you?

How did this relationship work at its best, before the issue?

You will need to be aware of (ask yourself):

Dynamics of this specific relationship – How is power used and expressed? Who controls the power?

•

Is there anything you learnt about yourself or the other person through listening to the whole story?

Wisdom from each other's stories

Appreciation of emotional intelligence – how I respond

Appreciation of social intelligence – how others respond

•

Raise the relationship between justice and peace as opposed to rights and law

Grace and truth work together to bring Christ's kingdom John 1:16-17

"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

•

Expressing the future. Your goal is to facilitate a relational journey through which they, together, come to a place of peace and justice.

Giving and receiving forgiveness

Communication – more than information; it is about meaning and context

Transforming the relationships

Writing a 'new community' story – Matt 18 principle (an idea of what the future looks like)

Holy Communion and Anointing (optional – if appropriate)

© Acorn Christian Foundation 2015