



SESSION D

Conflict Management & Resolution

RATIONALE/GOAL:

It is important to learn how to handle conflict in a positive manner. Hammet and Sofield, authors of Inside Christian Community say, "The way that a community handles conflict determines whether or not it [community] is successful." Confronting problems is painful, but problems do not just go away. They must be worked through or they will forever inhibit open communication and act as a barrier to spiritual and relational development.

The goal of this session is to learn how to deal with conflict and express anger or frustration in an appropriate way. It is also meant to help you connect your work for justice and your role as a peacemaker to your everyday lives and relationships.

OPENING:

Take a few moments of quiet to gather in God's presence, and begin with an opening prayer.

Then invite one person (or take turns) to read the following reflection:

What does it mean to work for justice? Does it not mean always being committed to the truth? If my work is to be truly valid, my challenge then is to always be truthful. But I must keep in mind that the truth is not always painless. The truth may call me to point out some unpleasantness in the world, in my relationships and in myself. Part of the reason it is difficult for us to call forth or focus attention on acts of unfairness is because many of us are taught, at a very early age, that to disagree or be angry with someone is a bad thing. "Good" Christians always turn the other cheek. It is not until we learn to deal with all of our emotions - not labeling any of them positive or negative - that we can begin to be "just" not only to each other but to ourselves.

Anger, when expressed in an appropriate fashion, is actually a good thing. We also need to understand that when anger is expressed toward us, we need not internalize it, but can learn from it. Anger does not mean hate. While hate brings destruction, anger brings change.

When we don't express our dissent or hurt feelings, we become frustrated to the point where our hidden anger affects other aspects of all our relationships. If we can learn to let go of anger gently, we can learn to work through whatever conflict comes our way. We can also take pride in the fact that we are no longer adding to confusion, but helping to bring about the enlightenment of the world.

We ask God to guide us as we discuss difficult issues, that we may have the strength to act out of love instead of anger.

EXERCISE:

I. Conflict Management Styles

Directions: After reading each of the responses listed below, decide whether you use it frequently, occasionally, or rarely. Write the appropriate number in the blank.

1 – Rarely 2 – Occasionally 3 – Frequently

How do you handle conflicts?

1. Threaten or fight the other person
2. Try to deal with the other person's point of view as well as your own
3. Look for a middle ground
4. Admit that you are wrong even if you do not believe you are
5. Avoid the person
6. Firmly pursue your goals
7. Try to find out specifically what you agree on and disagree on to narrow down the conflict
8. Try to reach a compromise
9. Give in
10. Change the subject
11. Whine or complain until you get your way
12. Try to get all concerns out in the open
13. Give in a little and encourage the other party to do the same
14. Pretend to agree
15. Try to turn the conflict into a joke

| I | II | III | IV | V |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ | 3. _____ | 4. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 6. _____ | 7. _____ | 8. _____ | 9. _____ | 10. _____ |
| 11. _____ | 12. _____ | 13. _____ | 14. _____ | 15. _____ |

Totals: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Scoring: Now add all the numbers in each column. The columns reflect five styles of resolving conflict. After compiling your scores, find which of the styles described below corresponds to

your highest score. Does this style fit your perception of yourself? What about your second and third highest scores?

I. Competing – “Hard bargaining” or “might makes right”

Pursuing personal concerns at another’s expense. Competing can mean “standing up for your rights,” defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

- ◆ Potential Uses – when immediate action is needed; when you believe you are correct.
- ◆ Potential Limitations – intimidates other people so they are afraid to admit problems and give you important information

II. Collaborating – “negotiating” or “two heads are better than one”

Working with someone by explaining your disagreement, generating alternatives, and finding a solution which mutually satisfies the concerns of both parties.

- ◆ Potential Uses – learning from another’s perspective; helpful when you need a decision that addresses the concerns of both parties
- ◆ Potential Limitations – not as helpful for minor decisions or when time is limited

III. Compromising – “splitting the difference”

Seeking a middle ground by “splitting the difference,” the solution partially satisfies both parties.

- ◆ Potential Uses – when all else fails; for fast decision making on minor disagreements; when two parties of equal strength are committed to mutually exclusive goals
- ◆ Potential Limitations – losing sight of larger issues and values and possibly not pleasing anyone

IV. Accommodating – “soft bargaining” or “killing with kindness”

Yielding to another person’s point of view; paying attention to their concerns and neglecting your own.

- ◆ Potential Uses – when you see that you are wrong; when you want harmony or credits toward a more important issue
- ◆ Potential Limitations – you may never get your concerns addressed

V. Avoiding – “leaving well enough alone”

Not addressing the conflict, either by withdrawing from the situation or postponing the issues.

- ◆ Potential Uses – when confronting is too dangerous or damaging; when an issue is unimportant; when a situation needs to be “cooled down”; or when you need more time to prepare
- ◆ Potential Limitations – issues may never get addressed

Once everyone has identified their top two styles, discuss them with one another. Is this how others in your community perceive you responding to conflict?

II. Reflect silently on the following questions, and then discuss them:

- A. Do I believe it is important to point out what might be upsetting me about another person's actions or attitudes, even if it may seem trivial? What prevents me from saying what is bothering me?
- B. If I were doing something that was bothering another person, would I like that person to let me know about it? How would I feel if that person was talking to other people about the problem and not to me?
- C. How do I feel when I am confronted? What is my initial reaction?
- D. Do I take time to think about how I want to phrase things when I need to confront someone or do I fly off the handle?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Become an Expert

Become an expert

in the art

of discovering the good

in every person.

No one

is entirely bad.

Become an expert

in the art

of finding the truthful love

in views of every kind.

The human mind abhors total error.

If You Disagree With Me

If you disagree with me,

you have something to give me,

if you are sincere

and seek the truth

as best you may,

honestly, with modest care

your thought is growth

to mine, correction,

you deepen my vision.

-Dom Helder Camara