

Engage Conflict Well

A Guide to
Prepare Yourself
and
Engage Others
in
Conflict Transformation



Engage Conflict Well is for everyone. We all are involved in conflict, in our families, our workplaces, our churches, and our communities. We can all be constructive in the way we engage conflict, making it an opportunity for growth, learning, healing and even revelation. We can all be a mediating presence in the midst of conflict, even when we are a party to the conflict, encouraging dialogue and collaboration. We are all called to be reconcilers.

Engage Conflict Well is also for mediators, facilitators, and conflict transformation consultants, especially for those who see their work as deeply spiritual and want to ground their theory and practice of conflict transformation in the Biblical and spiritual life: loving God, neighbor and self; being reconciled and being a reconciler.

We know that we need more than a theology of reconciliation and justpeace. We also need to develop the skills that enable us to be reconcilers. *Engage Conflict Well* sees these essential and simple life skills as spiritual practices, which require an openness to the Spirit that gives them authenticity and a lifetime of practice to become habits of the heart. These spiritual practices need to be studied and practiced with others and we invite you to use this guide in combination with such training. Some sources for training are listed at the back of the guide.

Engage Conflict Well is an overview of the theology, theory and practice of conflict transformation. We invite you to read it in its entirety to see the overview and how each section relates to the other sections. Then we invite you to savor each section, its scripture, its story or quotation, its presentation of the theory and practice, and its reflection on the metaphor of the well. *Engage Conflict Well* is written for guidance but also for contemplation. The bibliography at the back suggests other resources for your journey. You will also find on the back cover a summary of the themes of the guide as expanded in the book *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation: Creating a Culture of JustPeace* by Thomas Porter. To explore this and other resources, please visit our website www.justpeaceumc.org.

We found the metaphor of the well to be helpful in both illustrating and deepening our understanding of conflict transformation. We invite you to help us create such a well in our communities, so we can all be well together, experiencing healing in our relationships, reconciliation and holy communion.

Stephanie Hixon & Thomas Porter
Co-Executive Directors

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Note on Quotations: Scripture quotations are from the NOAB/NRSV unless otherwise noted. The citation of other works is provided in parentheses following the quotations. Most of the works from which the quotes are taken are listed in the section, “Resources for Further Exploration”

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PREPARE YOURSELF FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

CREATE A WELL NOT A WALL

Create in yourself an openness to conflict as part of God's creation, an opportunity for growth and revelation.

Conflict is the result of differences that produce tension.

Attitudes to conflict determine whether our response to conflict is destructive or constructive.

- Our attitude to conflict determines our response and our ability to transform and be transformed by it.
- The usual attitude is that conflict is bad, wrong or inevitably destructive.
- This attitude leads to defensiveness, fear and anxiety, and to the fight-or-flight response to the perceived threat. We often create walls that we fight to maintain or walls that we hide behind.
- Consider following the example of Jesus and the early Church.
 - Jesus went to Jerusalem. He did not fight or flee from conflict (see Jn 12).
 - Members of the early church, in the midst of significant theological, scriptural conflict, opened themselves to hear each other and the voice of God and enlarged the covenant to include uncircumcised gentiles (see Acts 15).
- We can choose to be constructive. It is our choice. We can choose to create a well or build a wall.

Socrates was sitting on a hill overlooking Athens, when a man stopped to talk with him.

The man asked, "What are the people like down there in Athens? Socrates said, "Where are you from?" The man replied, "Sparta." "And what are the people like in Sparta?" The man replied, "Rude, mean-spirited, not nice people." Socrates said, "You will find the people in Athens just the same. I would not go there."

Later, another man approached Socrates and asked, "What are the people like down there in Athens?" Socrates said, "Where are you from?" The man replied, "Sparta." "And what are the people like in Sparta?" The man replied, "Kind, generous, good people." Socrates put his arm around the man and said, "Let's go to Athens together. You will find the people in Athens just the same."

author unknown

Conflict is natural and necessary.

- Natural: Conflict is a natural part of a creation that is relational and diverse, a creation in which we are free to make choices. God declares it good. We will always have conflict. Let us not seek the absence of conflict but the presence of *shalom* or justpeace.
- Necessary: Conflict is essential to overcoming injustice, oppression and evil, and is a source of energy to do so. Often a constructive response will first heighten the conflict before it is ready for dialogue and mediation.

For where two or three are gathered [in conflict] in my name, there I am in the midst of them (see Mt 18:20).

Conflict calls us to conversion, trust and faithfulness.

- Our attitude to conflict is a matter of faith. Do we believe that God is at work in and through conflict? Do we believe that God was on the cross, the ultimate image of conflict and of love and solidarity in the midst of conflict? Do we believe that where two or three are gathered to transform conflict Jesus is present?
- Conflict drives us to our knees, to a dependence on God and interdependence with others. We learn to depend on the resources and power of the Spirit in new ways.
- Conflict opens us up to know God in fresh and powerful ways.
- We can recognize the "well" of conflict as a sacred space.

With a constructive and faithful attitude, we can transform conflict in a positive way.

- Conflict can be a catalyst for growth, learning and positive change: a time of discovery.
- This transformation can happen in us, our relationships and our social structures.
- To transform conflict in a positive way, we must be prepared with a constructive attitude, working to break the cycle of negative reactions and violence and being on the healing-edge.
- To transform conflict is to work for right relations, *shalom* or justpeace.

Creating a well in the midst of conflict is a challenge that involves risk, hard work and time.

Lead me through this conflict to my center where the waters are still and deep.

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

ALLOW THE WELL TO FILL

Open your heart and mind to God's love, as incarnate in Jesus, reducing your anxiety and drawing you toward reconciliation and being a reconciler.

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:17-18a).

God is Love.

- "In the beginning is Relation" (Martin Buber).
- All of creation is related in God.
- God's love is incarnate in Jesus.
- God's love is not a limited commodity. It is abundant, more than enough for all of us (see Walter Brueggemann).
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God.
- God forgives and reconciles.

Creation is relational.

- We are interconnected and interdependent. We are created for relationship with God and all creation.
- "A person is a person through other persons; your humanity is caught up in my humanity; if you are dehumanized, then inexorably I am dehumanized" (Desmond Tutu).
- Sin is the rupture of communion with God and our neighbor.

Dorotheos of Gaza, a sixth-century teacher, once preached a sermon for the monks in his monastery who were grumbling that they were unable to love God properly because they had to put up with one another's ordinary, irritating presence.

"Visualize the world as a great circle whose center is God, and upon whose circumference lie human lives.

"Imagine now," he asked them, "that there are straight lines connecting from the outside of the circle all human lives to God at the center.

"Can't you see that there is no way to move toward God without drawing closer to other people, and no way to approach other people without coming near to God?"

Roberta Bondi
Memories of God

We are created in the image of God.

- God is love. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves (see Mt 22:37-39).
- God is a reconciler. We are called to a ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Cor 5:17-18).
- "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 Jn 4:12).
- The purpose of the ministry and the Church is the increase of the love of God and neighbor (H. Richard Niebuhur, *Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*).
- God's vision for creation is right relations, *shalom* or justpeace.

Holiness is relational engagement (Walter Brueggemann).

- The movement in the Bible is from holiness as separation to holiness as relational engagement.
- This is the capacity to *be with* and *be for* others in ways that heal.
- This is living out of God's abundant love, not living out of scarcity or anxiety.
- This is experiencing the generative power of forgiveness.
- Through relational engagement everything can become new.

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

BE WELL PREPARED

**Be prepared to listen for understanding,
speak the truth in love, use your
imagination and be forgiving.**

“As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful” (Col 3:12-15).

Holiness as relational engagement requires skills.

- In starting the Mennonite Conciliation Service, Ron Kraybill learned from two United Methodists, James Laue and John Adams, that it was not enough to enter a conflict situation with only a desire to bring peace. Skills are needed.
- These skills are always informed and guided by the love that is compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, forgiving and grateful (see 1 Col 3:12-15).
- There are many skills we can learn, but foremost among these are the skills of listening for understanding, speaking the truth in love, using our imaginations and being forgiving. (Process skills are described in the section *Engage Others in Conflict Transformation*.)
- In the sacred space of conflict, these skills become spiritual practices that take us deeper into holiness as relational engagement.
- The single Chinese character for the verb *to listen* includes symbols for ears, eyes and heart.
 - Ears are for hearing. We were given two ears and one mouth. Spend significantly more time listening than talking. Use your mouth to let people know they have been understood, summarizing or paraphrasing what you have heard. When statements are not conducive to dialogue, you can also reframe, capturing the essence of what was said but in language that is more constructive.
 - Eyes communicate whether we are really being attentive and respectful. Create a space for the other where they receive your undivided, respectful attention.
 - To listen to someone with the heart is to listen with empathy. Acknowledge the feelings of the other person. Ask those open-ended questions that take them to deeper levels of speaking that they may not have known were there, to deeper sharing that allows you to enter into their experience.

Listen for understanding.

- “Let everyone be quick to listen” (Jas 1:19).
- All of peacebuilding can be summed up in listening
- Listening speaks to one of our deepest needs, to be understood or feel understood.
- Listening acknowledges and honors the uniqueness of every human being, even if we do not agree.
- Listening creates the possibility of learning and being changed.
- Listening recognizes that God speaks to us through the other.
- Our ability to listen to God is only as great as our capacity to listen to each other when we are in conflict (see John Paul Lederach).
- Listening creates the opportunity for the telling of stories and the experience of Pentecost, the creation of community in the midst of difference.
- The heart of good listening is authenticity, genuine curiosity and caring.

Speak the truth in Love.

- “Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15).
- Tell your story truthfully and with clarity. Focus on giving information about yourself—your needs, your emotions, the impact of the situation on you—not “you” messages that blame, mind-read or demand.
- Be specific; do not talk in generalities.
- Speak only for yourself, not for others.
- Be rooted in your feelings, here and now.
- Tell the truth that heals and lets the past be past for the sake of a new embrace (see Walter Brueggemann).

Clothe me with your love and teach me the skills to make that love real.

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Use your imagination.

- “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you perceive it?” (Is 43:18-19).
- Much of our destructive conflict is due to the lack or failure of imagination.
- A high degree of imagination is required of those in our culture who would follow Jesus and love God and neighbor.
- Using our imagination releases our creativity, opens our minds and hearts to the leading of the Holy Spirit, which involves being carried by the wind to places and ideas that we never dreamed possible.
- This involves letting go of our assumptions and positions, even if only temporarily.
- This also involves letting go of our desire to control the outcome or the solution.
- Consider brainstorming possible solutions, creating as many options as possible.
- Try to dream a preferred future.
- After creating many options, then evaluate them with your feet on the ground.
- Try to model this letting go of known ground to find common ground and even higher/holy ground. Others will follow.

Be forgiving.

- “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:14-15). “Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times’” (Mt 18:21-22).
- Forgiveness is a craft that needs to be learned. It is an embodied way of life. Each day it must be prayed for and struggled for and won (see L. Gregory Jones).
- “Forgiveness is where the victim of some hurtful action freely chooses to release the perpetrator of that action from the bondage of guilt, gives up his or her own feelings of ill will, and surrenders any attempt to hurt or damage the perpetrator in return, thus clearing the way for reconciliation and restoration of relationship” (Christopher Marshall).
- “Forgiveness is not weakness, the excusing of wrong, denial, forgetfulness, or automatic” (Christopher Marshall).
- “The dynamics of forgiveness involve acknowledging the situation needing forgiveness, deciding to enter the forgiveness cycle, giving voice to the pain and anger, being open to the offender, being willing to experience the ‘fellowship of sufferings,’ forgiving other parties, becoming reconciled with the past, and becoming reconciled with the person” (Christopher Marshall).

Add other skills to your toolbox.

- Seek further training in these and other skills. Consider the training opportunities listed on the inside back cover of this booklet.

Blessed are those who are willing to enter into the process of being healed, for they will become healers.

Blessed are those who recognize their own inner violence, for they will come to know nonviolence.

Blessed are those who can forgive self, for they will become forgivers.

Blessed are those who are willing to let go of selfishness and self-centeredness, for they will become a healing presence.

Blessed are those who listen with compassion, for they will become compassionate.

Blessed are those who are willing to enter into conflict, for they will find transformation.

Blessed are those who know their interdependence with all of creation, for they will become unifiers.

Blessed are those who live a contemplative life stance, for they will find God in all things.

Blessed are those who strive to live these beatitudes, for they will be reconcilers.

Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia
Mediation and Facilitation Training Manual
Mennonite Conciliation Service

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

BE WELL

**Accept forgiveness and healing
so that you can be a mediating
presence in the conflict.**

Be well.

- Holiness is wholeness, wellness, *shalom*.
- Even before we work toward bringing healing and forgiveness to others, let us receive them from God and through others.
- “How can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye?” (Mt 7:3-5).
- Our own behavior is what we have the greatest chance of changing.
- “It is indeed an absurd illusion to consider that we can work for peace, which means to be actively involved with people who are behaving in an unpeaceful way, if we are inwardly turbulent and ill-at-ease. Would-be peacemakers must...dig out the roots of unpeacefulness within themselves; the blindness, the illusory sense of ‘I,’ the cravings and antipathies and guilts. Without this effort, however partially successful, they can never hope to have any real effect on others” (Adam Curle, *Tools for Transformation*).
- “It means being in touch with our own emotions, embracing them and seeking to understand their source and their meaning. It means recognizing my inadequacies, doubts and fears, and being honest about them. It means being ready to admit when I’ve “blown” it and then picking myself up with grace and humility. It means being able to laugh at myself” (Carolyn Schrock-Shenk).
- True wellness is experienced when we attend not only to our wounds but to the wounds we have created in others.
- Have you been converted to a faithful attitude toward conflict? Have you allowed your well to fill with trust in Abundant Love? Are you committed to practicing the skills of conflict transformation as spiritual disciplines?

Be a well.

- Drawing from your own well, you can be a well and bring wellness to others.
- Be a mediating presence.
 - Bring people together.
 - Help create a relatively safe space for dialogue.
 - Encourage the telling and hearing of stories.
 - Acknowledge emotions.
 - Encourage the use of the spiritual practices.
 - Help people to resolve their own conflicts, healing themselves and reconciling with each other.

Do this even when you are a party to a conflict and you cannot be the facilitator or mediator. “It is true...that this work can be draining. But it can also be very life-

giving. Perhaps it is draining to the extent that it is a focus on ‘doing’ rather than ‘being.’ In other words, perhaps the more I can abandon the need to control, to be the expert and to fix others, the less drained I will be. The more that I can replace it with a quiet confidence that ‘in my weakness, God will be made strong,’ the more energized I will be.” (Carolyn Schrock-Shenk)

- We are freed in this role from believing we can or should be the fixer, the healer or the savior. We cannot

“On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let anyone who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (Jn 7:37-38).

bring about healing or reconciliation. We can only create the environment in which it can occur or the context for the Spirit to work.

- We are also freed from destructive triangulation.
- Be quick to give others the credit for good results; empower others.
- Know when to use third-party facilitators or mediators: when you are not impartial or perceived as impartial or when the expertise needed goes beyond your level of expertise.

We must not give to others what we have received for ourselves; nor must we keep for ourselves that which we have received to spend on others. You fall into the latter error, if you possess the gift of eloquence or wisdom, and yet—through fear or sloth or false humility—neglect to use the gift for others’ benefit. And on the other hand, you dissipate and lose what is your own, if without right intention and from some wrong motive, you hasten to outpour yourself on others when your own soul is only half-filled.

If you are wise therefore you will show yourself a reservoir and not a channel. For a channel pours out as fast as it takes in; but a reservoir waits until it is full before it overflows, and so communicates its surplus . . . We have all too few such reservoirs in the Church at present, though we have channels in plenty... They [channels] desire to pour out when they themselves are not yet in-poured; they are readier to speak than to listen, eager to teach that which they do not know, and most anxious to exercise authority on others, although they have not learnt to rule themselves. . . . Let the reservoir of which we spoke just now take pattern from the spring; for the spring does not form a stream or spread into a lake until it is brimful . . . Be filled thyself then...pour out thy fullness... Out of thy fullness help me if thou canst; and, if not, spare thyself.

Bernard of Clairvaux
Great Devotional Classics: Selections from the Writings of
Bernard of Clairvaux, ed. By Douglas Steere

May I now be for those I encounter as You are with me— truly present and healing.

ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

CREATE A COMMON WELL TOGETHER

Together analyze the conflict and design a collaborative process where everyone can participate and be responsible.

¹⁵“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (Mt 18:15-17).

Respond early in the life of the conflict.

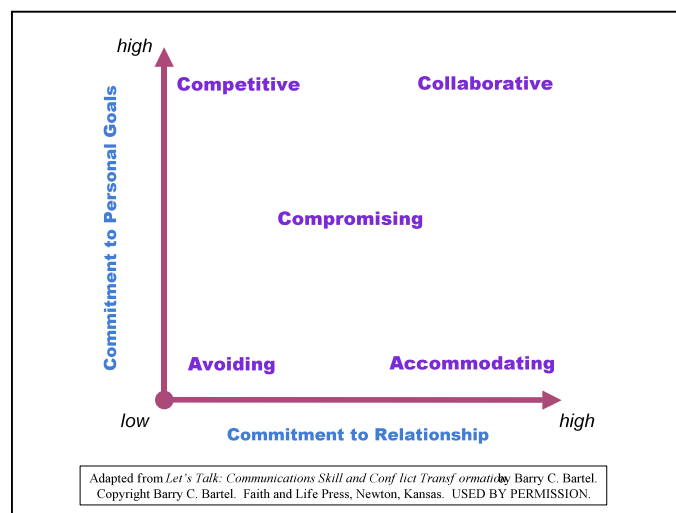
- If conflict is not engaged early, there is greater potential for escalation of tensions where the person is seen as the problem, issues multiply and become generalized, other people are dragged into the conflict (triangulation), people become reactive (eye for an eye) and opposition grows to the extremes.
- Early engagement of conflict in a constructive way can deescalate tension, decrease the chances for violence, maintain the ability to trust, ensure better communication as difficult issues are discussed and prevent person-to-person contact from becoming less direct.

Remember Matthew 18:15.

- Unless there are issues of safety, make sure that the parties have been in direct dialogue over the problems.
- Coach the parties in preparing for such dialogue, as you have prepared yourself.
- This approach helps to prevent you from being triangulated.
- If direct dialogue fails, then move to Matthew 18:16, and being a mediating presence.

Talk to key players in the conflict who can help you to understand it.

- Understand the people, the relationships and the systems involved; the problems, concerns and needs underlying the problems; and the role of poor process in creating the problems.
- Understand the level of the conflict, as this will help determine what is needed in the way of a response (see Speed Leas).



Educate the participants in good process.

- Process is as important as outcome—often more important where relationships are at stake. Everyone needs to feel valued and to be treated fairly. Generally people can live with a decision they may not actually prefer if they have had a voice in that decision or resolution.
- What God does first and best and last is trust His people with this moment in history. He trusts them to do what must be done for the sake of the whole community (see Walter Brueggemann).
- A collaborative process shows a high degree of commitment to both personal goals (empowerment of self) and relationships (recognition of the other) [see graph on this page].
- A collaborative approach, like mediation, is different from an adversarial approach [see table on next page].

ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Comparison of Adversarial Process vs. Mediation

Third party makes decisions	Parties make decisions
Looks to the past	Looks to future
Focuses on facts	Focuses on relationships
Seeks to establish liability/fault	Seeks to restructure relationship
Results in winner and loser	Results in accommodative resolution – win/win

- The facilitator (circle steward) of the process is responsible for maintaining the process: starting and concluding the circle with ritual; getting agreement as to the relational covenants (Share the Well); asking the questions that elicit the stories (Drink Deeply Together); summarizing the contributions of the circle after each round; helping the circle focus the issues and use its holy imagination to explore options and common ground; sometimes holding the talking piece to allow for group brainstorming; summarizing consensus or, if no consensus, what has been accomplished and what has not been accomplished.

Remember Matthew 18:17 if the collaborative processes do not work.

- We cannot collaborate successfully on all matters.
- There are times when we need others to decide for us (e.g. the church and the church leadership).

Design the collaborative process together.

- Make sure that the necessary parties are involved in the design as well: those who would be affected, those who might block any decision and those who could bring wisdom to the process.
- Decide who should facilitate.
- Be clear and open about the purpose, what is being discussed, when and where the process will take place and how decisions will be made.
- Provide the time and space necessary for all the parties to be heard.
- Maintain trust by providing for careful reporting to all concerned—no surprises.

The “circle process” is an example of good process.

- The process takes place with the participants seated in a circle. Everyone is equidistant from the center, with equal visual access to everyone else. Everyone has equal responsibility for the outcome. The process respects the experience and wisdom of each member of the circle.
- The circle is sacred. Opening and closing prayers and ritual gestures (e.g. lighting a candle) form the whole time and space together as sacred, a space safe enough for the speaking and hearing of truth. At the center of the circle is a reminder of God’s presence.
- A talking piece (e.g. a Bible) is used to help people listen for understanding and speak the truth in love. When you hold it you may speak; when you do not hold it, you listen; everyone has an equal opportunity to be heard without interruption and commentary; you may pass; the talking piece is passed in order around the circle so everyone knows when he or she will speak.

A conflict that had been brewing in the recently established church was starting to boil over. Members of the minority group—who spoke a different language than the majority group that controlled the leadership of the congregation—were starting to complain about how some among them were being treated. Specifically, the minority members were angry because the needs of some of their group were being neglected by the congregation.

Rather than become defensive and try to quiet those who were disgruntled, church leaders took action to address concerns. A meeting of the entire group was held, issues were discussed, and a plan proposed. The congregation appointed seven members of the minority group to care for neglected members. The solution pleased all. (Earliest known conflict in a Christian congregation, Acts 6:1-7.)

Richard Blackburn
Making Peace with Conflict

So that we can create together a place of safety and respect.

ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

SHARE THE WELL

Create a relational covenant that clarifies and affirms how everyone will be treated in the process.

Covenants define the significant relationships in the Bible.

- A covenant is a mutual agreement that binds people together.
- There were basically two kinds of covenants, those between people and those between people and God.
- The biblical experiences of God were always in covenant relationships, beginning with the covenant with Abraham through whom God intended to bless all the peoples of the earth; then the covenant with Israel; and then the covenant with Jesus Christ that built on and fulfilled the covenants that preceded it.
- A covenant involves honoring the other party.
- A covenant requires mutual accountability and responsibility.

Relational covenants are important for creating community.

- A relational covenant is the shared expectations and aspirations of a community or group as to how each member wants to be treated in the life of the community.
- A relational covenant becomes a set of shared promises to each other and to the community as a whole. These are more than rules about negative conduct and problems to be avoided. They are more than ways of bringing deviant conduct back into line. They are affirmations of the vision and values of the community and the positive conduct that expresses that vision and those values.
- Such covenants are critical to the creating and nurturing of community.
- If the creation of community—being the body of Christ—is the primary goal of the Church, then creating and living out of these covenants is as important, if not more important, than any other decisions that are made. Conflicts are still present but they are engaged constructively.
- Every community has many unexpressed and often conflicting rules as to how people should be treated. Being unexpressed, they provide no assistance in creating communal understanding and accountability. Being conflicting, they create more conflict. Conflict is often dealt with in parking lots after meetings, over the phone or e-mail and in secret meetings. All this undermines the honest, direct conversations that need to occur to correct understanding and allow people to demonstrate their best intentions transparently.
- Creating together an expressed, shared relational covenant is the most important work we can do to prevent destructive conflict.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:30-31).

Example:

Covenant for a Circle Process

What is shared while in circle stays in circle.

Personal information that is shared in circle is kept confidential except when safety would be compromised.

Speak with respect.

Speak only when you have the talking piece.

Speak only for yourself.

Be specific.

Speak in a way that encourages dialogue.

Be brief and to the point.

Listen with respect.

Listen for understanding.

Be open to being transformed.

Stay in circle.

Respect for the circle calls upon people to stay in circle while the circle works to find resolution to the issues raised.

ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

It is important to create these covenants together.

- To be valued and valuable to a community, these covenants must grow out of the life of the community; express the vision, values and strengths of the community as experienced by the community; and be owned by the members of the community.
- Ground rules that are simply imposed on a community do not have the “buy in” that would make them covenants. They do not enter into the blood stream of the community. They do not become part of the ethos of the community.

Address these issues when developing a covenant.

- How would you like to be treated?
- How should members of the Body of Christ be treated?
- What is the vision of the Body of Christ?
- How do we create the respect for each member as a child of God?
- How do we create sanctuary or safety for each member of the community?
- How do we listen for understanding, speak the truth in love, use our imaginations and be forgiving?
- How are we going to make decisions?
- How do we deal with the issues of confidentiality and transparency?
- How do we deal with accountability to the covenant?
- How do we maintain an openness to revise the covenant as needed?

Honor the covenant.

- Develop a sense of responsibility in each member for honoring the covenant and holding each other accountable.
- Apply the covenant consistently.
- Periodically review the covenant.

Once a church had fallen upon hard times. Only five members were left: the pastor and four others, all over 60 years old. In the mountains near the church there lived a retired rabbi. It occurred to the pastor to ask the rabbi if he could offer any advice that might save the church. The pastor and the rabbi spoke at length, but when asked for advice, the rabbi simply responded by saying, "I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you."

The pastor, returning to the church, told the church members what the rabbi had said. In the months that followed, the old church members pondered the words of the rabbi. "The Messiah is one of us?" they each asked themselves. As they thought about this possibility, they all began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off, off chance that each member himself might be the Messiah, they also began to treat themselves with extraordinary care.

As time went by, people visiting the church noticed the aura of respect and gentle kindness that surrounded the five old members of the small church. Hardly knowing why, more people began to come back to the church. They began to bring their friends, and their friends brought more friends. Within a few years, the small church had once again become a thriving church, thanks to the rabbi's gift.

author unknown

ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

DRINK DEEPLY TOGETHER

Elicit stories of peak experiences,
grace-filled moments and dreams of
a preferred future.

Sharing stories of peak experiences generates energy for moving forward.

- Be intentional about starting the process with remembering and telling stories of positive experiences or moments of grace.
- Starting with such stories is usually the better place to start than with the negative stories and a problem solving approach. In the context of such stories, the problems can then be addressed more easily and more constructively.
- Invite persons to share from their own wells about what gives them life.
- Let these stories become the focus of the common well, a source of strength and guidance for everyone in the process. We as individuals and as groups tend to move in the direction of our focus, whether it is positive or negative.
- Build on these stories. Build on strengths. Build on what is known and appreciated. This is more productive than trying to impose an abstract, unexperienced ideal of a better self or a better community.
- In conflict, build on the common themes and connections in the stories.

“A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’. . . The woman said to him, ‘Sir you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?’ . . . Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’” (Jn 4:7,11,13-14)

The most powerful tool in this process is an open-ended, positive question.

- Take the time and care to craft questions that evoke the positive experiences, dreams and constructive responses, e.g. “What are your hopes for this meeting?” instead of “What are the problems that have brought you here?”
- Positive questions promote the forward momentum of good process, e.g. “If your hopes for our meeting are fulfilled, what will our world, our community and our relationships look like?”
- In the sacred space of conflict, remembering grace-filled moments and expressing dreams of a preferred future, the primary question is always: What is God’s love calling us to be and to do?

Give everyone the freedom to dream.

- Build dreaming into the process, opportunities to express hopes for the future.
- Expressing hopes and visions for the future can amplify the positive experiences of the common well, generating even more positive energy for moving forward together.
- Sharing dreams and hopes together can reveal strong preferences, deep values and desires.
- People in conflict often find points of connection when sharing dreams of a preferred future that builds on their stories.
- Dreaming inspires creativity and innovation, thinking “out of the box.”

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now.

Rainer Maria Rilke

ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

LET IT FLOW

Move from positions to interests and needs, generating options to reach consensus.

Move from retribution to restoration: healing the harm, affirming accountability and creating a new relationship.

A focus on problems involves moving from positions to interests and needs, generating options, evaluating options and reaching consensus.

- A “problem” is an issue such as a dispute between those who want contemporary music and those who want traditional music in worship. We should note that such disputes can include issues of harm, which are addressed in the next column.
- After eliciting stories of peak experiences and dreams of a preferred future, the presenting problem might have been resolved. If the problem or problems still exist, they need to be addressed. Sometimes the conflict is so emotional that you must start here and then later move to the grace-filled stories.
- Move from positions to interests and needs.
 - Positions are statements or demands framed as solutions. Taking positions leads to impasse, sometimes compromise, but rarely to creative solutions that meet everyone’s needs and interests.
 - Positions express a solution to a deeper problem or needs and interests.
 - Criticizing people or their positions or trying to get parties to compromise and “back off” from their demands only causes them to cling more stubbornly to them. Rather than challenging the demands that people put forward, move the discussion to the underlying interests or needs. This begins by seeking more information through open questions that draw out these underlying needs and interests.
 - Parties discover that they share many of the same interests and needs.
 - List all of the needs and interests or issues.
 - Then seek options for meeting the interests and needs of both.
- Generate options to meet these interests and needs.
 - Brainstorm as many ideas as possible, without critical evaluation.
 - Welcome each idea and list them without comment.
- Evaluate options.
 - For each option, evaluate the pros and cons of each.
 - For each option, determine which ones best meet the

interests and needs of the parties.

- Reach consensus.
 - Summarize the agreement point by point with both parties.
 - Make sure everyone agrees to the summary.
 - Put the agreement in writing. If there are issues on which there is not agreement, be clear on these, stating what progress has been made and agree on a process for continuing to deal with those issues.

“A man was there named Zacchaeus... Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today’ . . . Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, ‘Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.’ Then Jesus said to him. ‘Today salvation has come to this house’” (Luke 19:2-10).

A focus on harm involves moving to healing, accountability and a new relationship.

- Harm is experienced in a situation, for example, when a female parishioner says that her male pastor has been sexually abusing her. This situation will also involve positions, interests and needs as addressed above, but the focus is clearly on addressing the harm.
- Our present system of justice focuses on retributive justice. The aim of retributive justice is to establish blame (guilt) and administer pain (punishment.) The process is a conflict between adversaries and one side wins and the other loses.
- Biblical justice as understood in the modern restorative justice movement focuses on harm to people and relationships. This is the offense. The aim of restorative justice is to identify obligations, to meet needs and to promote healing. The process of justice involves victims, offenders and the community engaging each other in a collaborative process, identifying obligations and solutions and promoting healing among the parties. (see Howard Zehr)
- Restorative justice focuses first on the harm to the victims and how to repair the harm as much as possible, both concretely and symbolically. This involves an emphasis on offender accountability and responsibility. Punishment is often counterproductive to such accountability. Accountability means being encouraged to understand the harm, to take responsibility and to make things right insofar as possible, both concretely and symbolically. (see Howard Zehr)
- In restorative justice the community is involved in working to heal the harm and support real accountability. The community recognizes its role in the harm as well. The community works to restore both the victim and the offender to the community. Restorative justice is about creating community.

In New Zealand, a conference was called about a young man who stole a car, vandalized it, and took some items that were important to the owners. The victims talked about how they had been harmed. The young offender, surrounded by his family, listened. His grandfather told him how he had shamed the family and the community and that he needed to make restitution to the victims, with Uncle Joe giving him a job so he could earn the money. He also needed to make things right with his family and the community. But, he went on to say, he still loved his grandson and would work with him to make things right. The victims were vindicated and received restitution. In fact, they came away forgiving the young man who apologized in his own way, but made it real by agreeing to do restitution. The offender accepted his

Delving deeper into our interests and needs, healing the hurt and the harm,

ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

BE WELL TOGETHER

**Celebrate each step
toward healing and communion.
Be prayerful, persistent and patient.**

Holiness as relational engagement leads to healing and communion.

- As God has shown us over and over again, broken relationships can be healed and communion can be restored and strengthened.
- The Holy Spirit is constantly working toward such healing and communion.
- This work is done through us.
- We can begin by leaving our gift at the altar (our expression of gratitude to God for what God has done for us) and by trying, first, to be reconciled with those who have something against us.
- As Amos says, God will not accept our gifts if we are not seeking justice and *shalom*: right relations, justpeace (see Am 5:21-24).
- The healing of relationships is a communal act.
- The health and wholeness of our communities will be determined by our treatment and relationship to the marginalized, by the welfare of our weakest members.
- We are only truly well if we are well together.
- If we work together to heal relationships and create right relations in all creation, we can truly experience holy communion and be a model to the wider society.

Be a truth and reconciliation person...for whom every meeting, every utterance, every gesture is about truth and about reconciliation. First, be about truth:

Truth about wonder and about wound
Truth about race and gender
Truth about money and power
Truth about not caring and not noticing
Truth that makes us free, about the self-giving
God and the self-giving community.

The truth that losing is gaining and keeping is losing, that emptying is the only way to fullness.

The truth that forgiveness is possible.

And only then be about reconciliation:

In quite concrete places.

That, as the result of truth telling, heals and lets the past be past, for the sake of new embrace.

Walter Brueggemann

Each step toward healing and communion should be celebrated.

- This is hard work. Healing and a reconciled communion are hard to achieve. We often fall short.
- Let us celebrate each step toward this goal of holy communion.
- Contemplate the journey of Jacob, first in his meeting with Laban and then later with Esau (see Gen 29:13-31:54).
- Jacob and Laban had reasons to be in conflict. Jacob ultimately fled from Laban. Laban pursued. Violence seemed inevitable. Instead of violence, Jacob and Laban agreed to create a zone of safety for each other. They established two pillars, each to their own gods. These pillars were the epicenter for this zone of safety, which included the whole of the universe. There was no embrace or reconciliation, but a significant step was achieved in the establishment of safety.
- As Jacob's journey continues, he encounters Esau with fear and trembling, as he expects to be killed. Instead he is met with an embrace and true communion and reconciliation.

"So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift"
(Mt 5:23-24).

- Every step away from violence, both physical and emotional, toward reconciliation is cause for celebration.

Be prayerful.

- We are inspired do this work by the Holy Spirit working through us.
- We need a prayerful openness to the guidance and the power of the Spirit.

Be persistent.

- The last word is the Resurrection, not the Crucifixion.
- Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God.
- Not giving up in the pursuit of justpeace is cause for celebration.
- Miracles happen.

Be patient.

- Just getting people to the table is a real accomplishment.
- In a society that encourages adversarial processes for "managing conflict," this is counter-cultural work.
- Be patient with yourself and others.
- Love does not resolve every conflict; it accepts conflict as the arena in which the work of Love is to be done (Daniel Day Williams).

ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

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Engage Conflict Well

Prepare Yourself For Conflict Transformation

Create a Well, Not a Wall

Create in yourself an openness to conflict as part of God's creation, an opportunity for growth and revelation.

Allow the Well to Fill

Open your heart and mind to God's love, as incarnate in Jesus, reducing your anxiety and drawing you toward reconciliation and being a reconciler.

Be Well Prepared

Be prepared to listen for understanding, speak the truth in love, use your imagination and be forgiving.

Be Well

Accept forgiveness and healing so that you can be a mediating presence in the conflict.

Engage Others In Conflict Transformation

Create a Common Well Together

Together analyze the conflict and design a collaborative process where everyone can participate and be responsible.

Share the Well

Create a relational covenant that clarifies and affirms how everyone will be treated in the process.

Drink Deeply Together

Elicit stories of peak experiences, grace-filled moments and dreams of a preferred future.

Let it Flow

Move from positions to interests and needs, generating options to reach consensus. Move from retribution to restoration: healing the harm, affirming accountability and creating a new relationship.

Be Well Together

Celebrate each step toward healing and communion. Be prayerful, persistent and patient.



The mission of JUSTPEACE Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation is to prepare and assist United Methodists to engage conflict constructively in ways that strive for justice, reconciliation, resource preservation and restoration of community in the Church and in the world.