

# Church Conflict: A Checklist for Transformation

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Everything is changing AND conflict is normal! Can you agree with both halves of that statement? Change brings new ideas and patterns of behavior. Daily conflict is as simple as negotiating schedules or figuring out new computer software and as complicated as developing shared values. Some conflicts extend over time as we build relationships with family, friends and foes or enter the realm of politics.

Conflict pushes us to learn new habits and open our minds to ideas we had not considered. Conflict sometimes pushes us to depend on others, and on God. Healthy conflict prompts us to right actions.

Here's a checklist for transforming conflict from anger to reconciliation in church meetings:

## PREPARATION FOR LEADERS AND COMMITTEES

- Talk about conflict, understand it as normal, and welcome questions
- Prepare for conflict by establishing ground rules about the way the committee or group will work together with respect.
- Invite different points of view on topics of agreement so group member practice using the ground rules.
- Remind people of the ground rules at the start of every gathering and hold one another accountable for living by them.
- Develop spiritual habits, and practice them individually and together.
- Practice listening for understanding, speaking the truth in love.
- Read Scripture together and individually to notice how often conflict is part of the human condition.

## RECOGNIZING CONFLICT

- Be aware of the emotional climate in yourself and in the group. Rising tension and defensiveness often indicate conflict; we often feel it before we name it.
- Respond to escalating emotion by slowing the conversation. Ask people to say some more about their position so others understand. Remember the ground rules you have established.
- Conflict has a scale of intensity from daily negotiation to irreconcilable differences. Learn to ask for help when you are unable to listen for understand or catch yourself feeling strong emotions.

## RESPONDING TO CONFLICT

- Recognize every one as a person of sacred worth who has unique life experience and unique perspective.
- Practice and coach others to listen for understanding.
- Use "I" language and speak only for yourself. Ask others to speak for themselves and ask questions for clarity.
- Learn the skill of reframing, that is, looking at an issue from multiple vantage points.
- Expand options: ask, "what else?"
- Move from positions and gripes toward expressing needs and interests.

- Evaluate options, pro and con.
- Use positive, open ended questions, such as "What is God calling us to do/be in this situation?"
- Know when an issue needs more time, avoid votes and work toward consensus.

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/church-conflict-a-checklist-for-transformation>

